

STYLED BY GOD: CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF  
INTANGIBLE CLOTHING

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **STYLED BY GOD: CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF INTANGIBLE CLOTHING**

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Expressions such as “clothe yourselves,” “put on and take off,” “garment of praise,” “garment of righteousness,” “garment of vengeance,” “garment of salvation,” and “wrapped oneself in” are value laden and provide strength to the biblical themes of spiritual or intangible clothes. Dispersed throughout the Bible are references that describe how clothes or coverings are metaphorically used as spiritual clothing and thereby enables humanity to dress from the inside out in the virtues and character of God (Col 3:12-17). This demonstration project focuses on how to teach African American teenage girls (13-15 years) to adorn themselves with the spiritual garments, the intangible clothes that shape their spirituality, connect them with God, and influence their clothing choices. To begin with, the paper discusses the theological implications of how both physical and spiritual clothes are identified in the biblical text and through the voices of the early church fathers including Tertullian (160-220 CE). Next, the paper investigates how theologies of clothing impacted the fashion choices, expectations of and treatment of women and girls over time. Finally, the paper analyses the methods that best represent tools for preparing and teaching youth leaders on the subject of theology of clothing in order for them to effectively assist teenage girls with developing their own theologies.

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*To my mother, Marinda Davenport who taught me how to sew  
and who allowed me to express my creative self and clothing style  
even though she did not always agree with me.*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING**

#### ***Dressed in Our Sunday Best***

Berean Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York

The spiritual clothes, the “innerwear” are twofold – positively representing the virtues and the character of God or negatively representing the dark side of the soul. They are what young women wear spiritually that determines how they choose their outerwear. Working with a group of African American teenaged girls at Berean, I observed that they were uncomfortable talking about their “innerwear,” selected their clothing based on how they felt when they woke up, and were influenced by the media and peers in their selection of clothes. I also learned from my four-month study that teenage girls who attend church are not connected with spiritual clothing despite the fact that they attend church. Some had trouble liking the image they saw of themselves in the mirror, and not aware of their “innerwear.”

Hence the backdrop for this dissertation “Styled by God: Constructing a Theology Intangible Clothing” emerged and seeks to introduce theologies of clothing at Berean Baptist Church. The goal is to create a “playbook” in order for youth leaders to teach African American teenage girls (13-15) to dress from the inside out. The research confirmed that theology of clothing is not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders at Berean due to a misconception about the word theology and no available or developed

curriculum to teach theology of clothing. Much of the existing research excludes the pedagogical aspect for youth leaders to teach theology of clothing in a cultural context. It was also established in the research that there is a link between attitudes and clothing choices.

In this discourse I will discuss theologies of clothing from three theological perspectives: skin as clothing, fabric as clothing and spiritual virtues as clothing. Each will be discussed in conversation with a womanist theological framework along with the biblical text and the early church fathers Tertullian, and Augustine. I will also explore how theologies of clothing have impacted fashion choices, expectations of, and treatment of women and girls over time. I will also argue that theologies of clothing are not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to teenage girls thereby necessitating the need for a contextual, theological playbook for youth leaders to teach girls about dressing from the inside out.

### **The Setting**

I selected Berean Baptist Church as the setting for this demonstration project for four main reasons: first because Berean has a robust youth ministry with a fairly large African American teenage female population, secondly because Berean's pastor is progressive and receptive to new ideas, thirdly, it is the church of my childhood and where I currently serve as an Associate Minister, and finally because Berean is a church where people still dress up in their "Sunday Best."

Located in the Weeksville/Carrsville section of Brooklyn (which is South Crown Heights), Berean Baptist church was founded by a mixed group of Abolitionists in 1847, and incorporated in 1850 at a time when America was but a decade from civil conflict. According to Berean's historians, this group of community men and women fought

against two major injustices in New York City throughout the course of their early existence as a church. The first injustice was that of slavery in America and through the Abolitionist Movement – Berean participated in the Underground Railroad along with other churches to assist persons of African descent to achieve freedom. The second injustice was the Civil War Draft Riots in New York City in 1863 when Berean aligned with other sympathizers against the brutality of Black people during this bloodbath which was the bedrock of Irish classism through racial, social, and economic oppression.<sup>1</sup> Berean has embodied the Baptist tenets of faith and social justice since its nascent phase and continues today.

Crown Heights, comprised of four zip codes 11213, 11233, 11238, and 11216, boasts a population of 96,317, with Black/African Americans being the largest ethnic group with 63,100— even though there was a decrease of 15.8 percent from 74,942 in 2000. White Non-Hispanics have increased to 16,056 up 16 percent from 6,536/ 6.8 percent from the 2000 census. The total population under 18 years old is 20,784 with 14,596 Black/African American, a decrease of 31 percent. Females represent 54.9 percent and males 45.1 of the Crown Heights population.<sup>2</sup> Berean is located between two major New York City Housing projects, affordable, low-income and unaffordable housing, private row homes and large apartment buildings. There are 1397 members on the church membership rolls, including 332 adult men; 870 adult women; 120 young adults (18-27),

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<sup>1</sup> Tracey Cooper and Carol Dixon, *Remembering Our Past, Redeeming Our Future: Berean Baptist Church Commemorative History Book* (Port Washington: 2001), 11-17.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of City Planning, [www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/neigh_info/socio_demo/bk08_socio_demo.pdf), [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/neigh\\_info/socio\\_demo/bk08\\_socio\\_demo.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/neigh_info/socio_demo/bk08_socio_demo.pdf). (accessed January 24, 2015).

and 75 youth (5 -17).<sup>3</sup> The congregation is predominantly African/Caribbean American (95%) with a small number of Latinas/os, and Caucasians.

It has been the phenomenal pastoral leadership over the years that have propelled Berean to its heights, especially entering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century under the leadership of Dr. Arlee Griffin, Jr. As the nineteenth pastor in the church's 165 year history, Dr. Griffin implemented structural changes in order for the church to see itself as a ministry organized to know the gospel and spread the gospel. He redesignated clubs and auxiliaries as ministries. Pastor Griffin brings to the ministry great vision, creativity, flexibility and excellence, and stresses to the congregation the need to go higher in their thinking, ministry assignments and gifts (natural and spiritual). In addition, he encourages congregants to be students of life. The scripture reads in Acts 17:11 (NIV):

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Berean adopted this passage of scripture as its primary discourse for the congregation. Perhaps an even more powerful expression of the pastor's vision is through his emphasis on theological education, not only for ministers, but also for laypersons. It is in the milieu of theological study, that I am proposing this project. It is important that the next generation is prepared to inherit the mantle of prophetic ministry that Berean maintains, and youth leaders are positioned as the bridges to transport knowledge through theological training.

Berean's mission embodies the doctrines and traditions of the faith and gives space for congregants to mature into the knowledge of Jesus Christ as found in Matthew

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<sup>3</sup> Information obtained from Berean's membership roster.

28:19-20, to make disciples of all people. The church seeks to fulfill its mission by the following:

- A ministry of *Kerygma* (Proclamation) which includes corporate worship services, preaching, and teaching the gospel in word, deed, and prophetic witness;
- A ministry of *Koinonia* (Fellowship) which includes Christian nurture, Christian education, evangelism and discipleship; and,
- A ministry of *Diakonia* (Service) which includes local and global missions, social services, social action and advocacy, and social justice.

An interesting contribution that Dr. Griffin makes to our church culture is the maroon-influence. Maroon is his favorite color because it symbolizes the determination and strength of his ancestors, the Maroons of North Carolina who in defiance escaped slavery and outsmarted the slave owners through their habitation in the Great Dismal Swamp. History records, as early as the 1650s how enslaved Africans escaped into the American wilderness to form their own separate communities – a New World adaptation of an African form of resistance. These maroons (or outlyers, as they were often called in North America) set up small communities in swamps or other areas where they were not likely to be discovered.<sup>4</sup> Maroon is not only reflected in his attire, but also in the church logo, stationary, banners, marketing materials, and the décor of the church. When one walks through the church campus, these Afrocentric threads are visible and are intertwined in the woven fabric of our faith tradition, church history and culture.

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<sup>4</sup>Africans in America, Revolution Pt. 2, *Maroons in the Revolutionary Period 1775-1783*.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p50.html> (accessed October 3, 2014).

## A Unique Ministry

Berean is a prototype for urban ministry in the Borough of Brooklyn. It is not only a house of worship with historical significance, but a source for community development, social reform, and economic empowerment with the formation its Berean Community and Family Life Center (BCFLC). This tradition of the church establishing community institutions dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to historian, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, all the black denominations established community institutions and advanced the philosophy of racial self-help. But it was in the Black Baptist church where this philosophy found its largest following.<sup>5</sup> Higginbotham further notes that because of denied access to public facilities such as parks, libraries, restaurants and other public spaces, the black church became that public space.

It housed a diversity of programs including schools, circulating libraries, concerts, restaurants, insurance companies, vocational training, athletic clubs...it was the one space truly accessible to the black community... a critical arena where values and issues were aired, debated and disseminated throughout the black community.<sup>6</sup>

Established in 1989, BCFLC has been addressing the needs of the congregation and the residents of the surrounding community through employment training and job placement, summer youth programs, senior citizen services, affordable housing opportunities and food pantry programs. In 2002, in response to the over-representation of incidences of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, HIV/AIDS and obesity affecting people of color in the surrounding communities, BCFLC took action to address these preventable diseases by creating and adding a health and wellness component to its services – it was the first of its kind in New York City for a faith-based organization to house a medical incubator

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<sup>5</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

providing needed health services in the community – OB/GYN, podiatry, gastroenterology, pediatrics and adult medicine, cardiology and nutrition.

Weight loss and prevention has been the central theme of BCFLC for youth as well as adults. Since its inception, several wellness programs have helped to make a difference in the lives of youth, particularly teenage girls, by offering healthier food choices, personal nutrition counselling and fitness classes. In 2009, BCFLC created what is now known as the award winning, highly acclaimed Berean Community Drumline. The Drumline functions as a venue for providing teens up to eighteen years old, physical fitness and health, education and socialization through competitions, parades and special events. More importantly, participation in the Drumline has produced results reflecting that 85% of the high school students matriculated to college.

In 2014, Berean completed 107-units of affordable housing adjacent to the church with 10,000 square feet allotted for BCFLC's new offices and wellness center. Additionally, in 1996, Berean built a 77-unit senior housing complex, Berean Gardens, a few blocks away from the church where age appropriate services are provided.

### **My Personal Journey at Berean**

One of the Bible verses that was imparted into my spirit as a child growing up in a family that insisted we attend church was “Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The assertion can be made clearer by illuminating the fact that my parents instilled within me a sense of service and participation in church activities that made this passage of scripture actualized. My siblings and I were actively involved in all of the youth organizations at Berean —choirs, junior missionary society, ushers, Girl and Boy scouts, Sunday School,

as well as religious instructions every Wednesday afternoon held at Berean (we had permission to leave school to attend).

As a young person, the nuances of religion or the social/ecclesial dynamics of Baptist traditionalism did not make sense to me, yet my socialization revolved around the church. In other words, my introduction to etiquette and debutant balls, creative arts and drama, fashion shows and ski trips, public speaking and leadership training were developed at church through the youth ministry. The Youth Lay League (YLL), the central youth ministry of Berean Baptist Church was the highlight of growing up in the church as a teenager and served as a catalyst that enabled many young people to succeed in school, the workplace, and in most cases, adulthood. It was in church that relationships were formed – relationships that are still in effect (even marriages) – making the church a place for gathering, social interaction, and good times. In the words of Katie Cannon, “It [the church] was the only place outside the home where Blacks could express themselves freely and take independent action.”<sup>7</sup> The church was the heart, center, and important organization in the African American community.

I was baptized at a young age – around ten years old. At that tender age, I did not fully understand the depth or meaning of baptism, nor did I understand the work and power of the Holy Spirit, and what being a new creation in Christ meant, even though I was educated in the church through weekly religious instruction and Sunday School. What stood out as normative for many youth in the church regarding scriptural knowledge was nondescript since knowledge was imparted without scriptural praxis.

In retrospect, I cannot say that my upbringing focused on spirituality or making meaning of who God is with theological inference. Individuals who wanted deeper

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<sup>7</sup> Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 51.

spiritual insight pursued it. As a teenager, I did not develop a personal relationship with God, Jesus, or Holy Spirit because I did not see examples of the power and preeminence or excellence of God lived out in a practical, relevant way by church leaders and other adults.

I shared this story from my past as a way of positioning myself in the contexts of being an adolescent, being a woman, and being in leadership at my church – in 2009 I was ordained and serve as an Associate Minister. Today, as an adult, I care about helping teenage girls navigate through life’s maze with the same care that was showered upon me by the youth leaders when I was growing up. My faith journey as an adult helped shape the way I support youth ministry in the church and perceive the needed transformative programs and services that can best prepare other youth leaders to carry out the mission of the church.

### **Berean’s Youth Ministry**

Berean has been known for its vibrant youth ministry and programs throughout the years. I conclude that an activity-driven model has been the sustaining method of engaging youth in the church. Special holiday programs set the tone for youth of all ages to learn something about God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. Today’s youth programs use a holistic approach that considers the totality of the young person. Youth in modernity require so much more relational focus: (a) with their peers, (b) with other adults in the church, (c) with the triune God, (d) with the greater community, and (e) with themselves (not necessarily in this order) due to the stresses, challenges and conformities of what society is endorsing. Feeding and nourishing the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of youth is a priority for Berean which is more intentional than when I was growing up. It is possible that family values and cultural nuances dictated the day. When I was growing

up we were told, “What goes on in this house, stays in this house!” therefore, discussing painful, life issues was not permissible. Inevitably, attention must be strategic in order to address the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of young people. That is why programs with healing modalities are beginning to present themselves at Berean through scriptural lessons and formational prayer. This approach echoes practical theological reflection – putting what we know about Jesus Christ from the biblical text into practice. According to theologians Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean in their book *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, theology is not satisfied with simply articulating the crisis; it also seeks to address it<sup>8</sup> and the youth leaders at Berean plan to be more intentional at addressing some of the crises our youth experience.

Between the BCFLC, the church, and the youth leadership team, youth have opportunities to receive the total package – physical, spiritual and social. The vast majority of youth programs at the church have an educational component that demonstrates how to put faith into action outside of the church. Entrenched in the framework of education is the contextual particularity according to age, and type of youth group. By that I mean that the Girl Scouts have their program, some percentages of the curriculum are mandated from the parent body/national office and others are developed by the leaders. BCFLC sponsors the Community Drumline (BCD) that provides musical instruction, as well as life skills training and wellness components. While these two entities, Girl Scouts and BCD provide a heavy social aspect, they are educationally driven. Albeit, many of the youth in these two programs are not members of Berean, nevertheless they participate in Bible Study and other church related youth activities and Sunday services on occasion.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), 86.

In addition, other youth ministry programs include BCFLC Academy: a new initiative that provides youth with access to the resources they need to grow as scholars and leaders in their communities. High school seniors and juniors take advantage of this program (led by one of the young adult leaders) to strengthen their writing skills, access community service opportunities, and receive tutorial services. Youth Emphasis Sunday, created over forty years ago, was designated as every third Sunday to give space for youth to participate and lead worship service. The Junior Ushers, Youth Praise Team, the Sonshine Choir and youth Sacred Dance Ministry minister every third Sunday. Berean also has Youth Church that is conducted during Sunday morning worship: children 12 years and under leave the sanctuary to go to their own space where they participate in arts and crafts, praise and worship and scriptural messages. The King's Kids Ministry – the nursery service for toddlers and children five years old and under is also provided during the 11:00 am worship service.

### **Preparing the Next Generation of Leaders**

At present there are thirty (30) youth ministry leaders at Berean who work in various capacities within the different youth departments, committed to ensuring that youth grow academically, socially and spiritually. Some leaders desire to see more emphasis placed on addressing the spiritual development of youth and their relationship with God. The premise is that church is more than a social gathering place, it is a place for spiritual development. This is succinctly stated by Ginny Ward Holderness in *The Exuberant Years*, “Our work with youth is distinctive. We are not leading another social club. We are involved in the mission of the church, in the ministry of Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Ministry to youth is much more than activities, and church is more than a place for

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<sup>9</sup> Ginny Ward Holderness, *The Exuberant Years* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), 15.

socializing with friends. The youth pastor is clear about youth leaders understanding how to make meaning of God in such a way that they are able to help youth understand and know God, in order to continue the work of prophetic ministry that is representative of Berean.

Several of the youth leaders are teachers by profession, which makes the incorporation of teaching skills and educational fundamentals available and implemented to ensure a higher degree of learning. The diversity of age among youth leaders also sheds a unique light on the range of experience. In other words, the older leaders (50 years of age and older) who have been faithfully teaching the youth at the church for years have their methods, while the younger ones (under 40 years) who are teachers or professionals have their methods, and the two methods work together successfully. Ironically, the older youth leaders work with children under twelve and the younger youth leaders work with youth over twelve.

Berean's youth ministry is supervised by a Youth Pastor, who brings to the ministry the experience of working with youth in a robust way. Her educational background, profession as an attorney, and position as an ordained Baptist minister, set a standard for teaching youth and how youth learn. Her focus is on education and programs that empower and prepare youth for college and higher learning, in addition to providing them with life skills. She encourages youth to write because writing is an important tool when filling out college applications, and writing the essay portion, and also enables youth to express themselves through this creative methodology of journaling. She is currently preparing the young adults (20-30 year olds) to lead the youth ministry by having them facilitate teen Bible study and work with the teen praise team through musical direction, praise and worship methods and song selections. The young adults are

also included in the youth leaders meetings as part of their preparation for leadership in youth ministry. These young adults grew up in Berean and therefore familiar with the church structure and culture.

But perhaps an even more powerful expression of what our Youth Pastor brings to Berean is her biblical hermeneutics – when she preaches she imparts information that connects with youth. The leadership of the Youth Pastor and the other youth leaders is tantamount to what Alice Walker terms in one of her womanist definitions – wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one;<sup>10</sup> or to add particularity to it, they provide intellectual space to unearth many treasures<sup>11</sup> as Rosetta E. Ross theorizes about womanist religious thought. Both youth leaders and youth want to know more about God, Jesus and Holy Spirit and this demonstration project will help facilitate the spiritual growth in youth leaders that would enable them to create models of teaching theology in general and theologies of clothing in particular for youth.

### **How Youth Leaders are Trained/Mentored**

At the present time there is no formal training or mentoring programs available at Berean for youth leaders. Youth ministry leaders serve in the church on a voluntary basis. They meet monthly with other youth leaders, including those who work with teen Bible Study, Girl Scouts, Sunday School, Junior Ushers, and Youth Church using a workshop model with the Youth Pastor. The time spent together generally lasted about three hours on Saturdays centering on a variety of topics to determine where the leaders are in their individual ministries, to provide updates in the overall ministry, and to garner input for

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<sup>10</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1983), xi.

<sup>11</sup> Rosetta E. Ross, “Lessons and Treasures in Our Mother’s Witness: Why I Write about Black Women’s Activism” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, Stacey M. Floyd Thomas, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 115.

future visioning. During my two years with the youth ministry I observed the dichotomy in the structure. On the one hand, leaders are asked to develop suggested themes for the year, and to share their strengths and weaknesses as a youth leader. On the other hand, the Youth Pastor proposes her vision for successfully empowering youth academically and spiritually, and what she believes will make a meaningful experience for the youth and youth leader.

In my conversations with the Youth Pastor, I learned about the challenges she experiences from some of the youth leaders who have a mindset contradictory to what the youth leaders of yesteryear had – the mindset that asks, “What’s in it for me?” Instead of the sacrifice, she indicated that she is faced with opposition due to their personal priorities having precedence over meetings or trainings. The fact that ministry is on a voluntary basis makes it easy to deny the sacrificial endeavors since there is no monetary payment for services rendered. Kenda Creasy Dean reminds us that, “The vocation of the youth leader is to help young people “choose life” (Deut. 30:19) by equipping them with the faith, hope and love needed to recognize God’s forgiveness and embrace the life God intends for them.”<sup>12</sup> This is the central theme in ministry – it is not about us, but unto others as the Apostle Paul declares, “In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of the others” (Phil 2: 3b-4). Positioning and purpose is critical for effective ministry in general and a necessity particularly in youth ministry. A youth leader must be in the right position – know they are called to youth ministry, and ultimately purpose will be revealed for use of methodologies and practices.

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<sup>12</sup> Root and Dean, *The Theological Turn*, 14.

Berean’s Youth Pastor understands that intentional training of youth leaders is necessary, and she appeals to them to embrace the need for such training, in order not only create a sustainable, holistic model that will include Christian Education, social programs, and physical fitness and wellness that will benefit youth; but also allow their personal spiritual growth and development to flourish as well.

### **Dressed in Our Sunday Best: A Base for the Problem**

Irrespective of Berean’s fervent stance on social justice, it is also a place where the outward appearance of a person is important. Those who were raised by African American families in the fifties and sixties remember having a separate wardrobe for church, school, for play. Mixing the three were not interchangeable. School clothes were not worn to church, church clothes were not worn to school, and play clothes spoke for themselves. There was a certain degree of reverence inherent in this clothing ideology. The emphasis was on presenting God with your best. I remember how my family and members of Berean attended church on Sunday mornings dressed in our “Sunday Best” – it was reflective of family values and societal norms at that time. Much of this ideology emanated from the emergent movements in the black church – the institution of national conventions, education, the Talented Tenth, and challenging the White structures of oppression and injustice. Black women collaborated with White women in aligning themselves with religious associations and secular clubs. It was important to have a respectable look. According to Higginbotham, the Baptist women’s preoccupation with respectability reflected a bourgeois vision that vacillated between the failure of America to live up to its liberal ideas of just and equality and the attack on the values of lifestyles of Blacks who transgressed white middle-class propriety.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Black Baptist

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<sup>13</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous*, 15.

women were wobbling between radicalism and conservatism. They felt certain that respectable behavior would earn advancement in the larger society and that included refined manners, Victorian sexual morals, and the rejection of gaudy colors in dress.

Such is not the case today. Family values have changed. Dress codes have changed particularly for women, young women and teenage girls and the changes have impacted the church in a dialectical way. In other words, there are two opposing forces that have developed. There are church members who still believe in dressing in their “Sunday Best” to reverence God, and those who believe members should “come as you are” because God looks at the heart. Probing questions began to develop for me at the start of this project such as, “Does God really care about what we wear? Do African American teenage girls recognize the link between faith and fashion? What is the real problem with the way teenage girls dress? Are youth leaders discussing clothing, faith and identity with youth?

### **The Problem**

I made assumptions about the way African American teenage girls dressed based on my observations which were judgmental and biased. Therefore, in order to begin to address the above questions, I turned to the Youth Pastor for guidance and insight. I was not aware of how the theological connection between clothes and faith affected both teenage girls and youth leaders. It was determined in a discussion with my adviser that the deeper issue in this case is about theologies of clothing and how theologies of clothing are not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to teenage girls (13-15).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE**

#### ***The Devil Really Wears Prada***

*Theology of clothing is not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders at Berean to African American girls (13 – 15).*

The project I propose is to create a “playbook” that youth leaders, parents and pastors can use as a pedagogical tool to teach African American teenage girls how to shape their spirituality, develop their own theology(ies) of clothing and dress from the inside out. However, during my research, a glaring revelation emerged – the project needed a preliminary step before the playbook could be developed and ministered directly to teenage girls. It became apparent that youth leaders needed an understanding of theology, and a deeper commitment to shaping their spiritual growth. All five of the youth leaders I interviewed expressed a desire to learn more about theology, and wanted the resources to be available in order for them to progress with their spiritual development. This process is necessary in order for youth leaders to comprehensively help girls understand the theological inferences of clothing for practical application in their daily lives.

The analysis of the challenge will be explored three ways. To begin, the first area of exploration revealed that a theology of clothing is not well articulated or circulated at Berean by youth leaders. Secondly, youth leaders are not given sufficient exposure to a theology of clothing. The lack of sufficient exposure is not an intentional oversight by

church leadership. The word theology is underused at the church thereby making the opportunity for youth leaders to be exposed or aware of the values derived from a theology of clothing in support of its ministry to girls minimal. Finally, African American teenage girls are not given sufficient exposure to theologies of clothing. How do teenage girls develop a positive identity, build self-esteem and body consciousness in lieu of an understanding a theology of clothing?

### **Something about that Word Theology**

Growing up in a Baptist convention means that certain words or phrases are not overtly articulated to describe what the faith tradition represents or to explain how we understand or know God. A primary example of this linguistic misunderstanding is the word theology – a word when used around the Baptist church has a connotation equivalent to profanity. Many of the older African American preachers were not seminary trained thereby causing the misunderstanding of the word to create schisms and fears in the church community that eventually led to an anti-seminary philosophy among laypersons. In other words theology was connected to seminary and seminary connected to a worldly view of God, Jesus and Holy Spirit taught by those who were not Christian. This association did not have a place in the African American church. In fact the seminary has often been referred to as the “cemetery.” I can attest to this misguided perspective regarding the word theology because of my own experience in church and the Baptist community.

The negative ideology perpetuated in the church around the word theology and teaching about God in seminary is one that has been passed down and absorbed into the church culture. And as I reflect on comments and phrases such as the aforementioned, they too became a part of my vocabulary until I attended seminary and discovered

otherwise. Theology is not a word used around Berean although existentially an embedded theology exists within us. In other words, every human being has a theology. Some terms have to be clarified: the word theology encompasses the systematic study of the nature of God. According to Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, a continual theme of Christian theology is that every new generation must take up the task of faith in search of understanding with fresh vigor and creativity.<sup>14</sup> Lucretia Yaghjian, author of *Writing Theology Well*, describes theology as, “A spoken and written language that is in the words of Rowan Williams “used by a specific group of people to make sense of their world.””<sup>15</sup> Rethinking the assumptions of who God is as generations, mindsets, and the political atmosphere change brings forth other questions – how does the church reflect God or bring God into view? How can youth leaders make God real for African American teenage girls? I argue the reasoning may go back to oral traditions passed on from the ancestors on how African Americans did church, and how they know and relate to God.

Our knowledge of God begins in childhood as a figment of our imagination or taught by family, school or church. How we come to think about God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit is theological in nature without the word theology attached. This thought is consistent with Pastor Griffin’s who stated during our interview on November 19, 2014 “One of the reasons for the Baptist church not being explicit about using the word theology in the Baptist tradition has to do with an historical pattern where churches have not placed a value on theology. Nevertheless, we are doing theology in all that we do in

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<sup>14</sup> Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, eds. *Constructive Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Lucretia B. Yaghjian, “Teaching Theological Reflection Well, Reflecting on Writing as a Theological Practice” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no.2 (2004), 83.

and around the church.” The scriptures remind us in James 1:22, “...but prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

I concur with Pastor Griffin as he asserts a false notion exists in our faith tradition that implies to talk about theology is too intellectual, not being spiritual, or not being Christ-like and goes deep into the roots of the anti-intellectual movement, a movement that has had its grip on so many churches in America. James Cone clarifies this in *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* when the Black separatists failed to write creeds or doctrines to define theologically the difference between Black faith and the White churches they separated from.<sup>16</sup> This assertion can be made clearer as Cone ascertains the failure by Black Christians to reflect intellectually on the meaning of their faith encouraged them to assume there was no theological difference between Black and White views of the gospel.<sup>17</sup> Higginbotham posits, during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the educated men women of the Talented Tenth became cognizant of cultural bifurcation within the Black church. One cultural form embraced the educated ministers and laypersons who employed intellect and skill on behalf of the race; and the other cultural form, represented by the illiterate masses, who exhibited no knowledge or interest in education.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary churches have not changed significantly when it comes to intentionally discussing theology, or assisting congregants in the shaping of their own theologies based on social location or hermeneutics. The small group session and the surveys collected from clergy and youth leaders in connection with this project further support this assertion.

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<sup>16</sup> See James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 91.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous*, 43.

The lynchpin in this discourse is to ascertain whether teenage girls at Berean are given an opportunity to identify and understand a theology of clothing in a formal teaching environment. That is to say, in order for teenage girls to understand a theology of clothing, youth leaders are required to have an understanding of theology themselves. Root and Dean submit that youth workers need to become theologians because unfortunately, youth workers have not assumed the vocation as a call to be practical theologians or that theological reflection is becoming the norm.<sup>19</sup> Their premise is indicative of paradigmatic learning. Youth ministers/workers must make a shift in their ministry praxis and the way in which they teach youth in order for the youth to shape their spirituality and practice their faith.

The problem or challenge from my location at Berean originated out of my passion for fashion and how ministry and the biblical text, through its use of clothing as spiritual attributes, metaphors and contexts, can support African American teenage girls in praxis for dressing from the inside out. While clothing provides a basic need in life – warmth, protection, covering – there are scriptural associations to clothing that take on a variety of forms and construct for us theologies of clothing. By what method do teenage girls develop a positive identity, build self-esteem, and understand body consciousness in lieu of an understanding of theologies of clothing? How does faith play a role in determining their external and internal clothing choices? In what way do youth leaders help girls interpret the metaphors of clothing mentioned in the biblical text that will be practical for them and inspirational enough for them to want to “put on” the spiritual or intangible clothes? More importantly, how do we cultivate a space or create a “playbook”

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<sup>19</sup> Root and Dean, *Theological Turn*. 15.

for youth workers to gain understanding of theologies of clothing in order for them to teach or share what the Bible instructs about clothing with girls?

### **Theologies of Clothing Not Well Articulated or Circulated**

In theory, to confront the challenge that theologies of clothing are not well articulated requires that we first help youth leaders understand theology, their own theology and how to help shape the theology of teenage girls. Without the knowledge or ability to exegete or read the biblical text with relevancy to clothing, garments and covering in their relationship to salvation, eternal life and as ambassadors for Christ, makes it difficult to justify the information for discussion with girls. This will require the youth pastor and church leadership to take an active role in ensuring that all youth leaders, teachers and laypersons who work with youth have a space where they can discuss making meaning of God. The Youth Pastor and I are currently working on a continuum for theological study and practical methodology to confirm that youth leaders are well informed and equipped to discuss theology contextually and theologies of clothing specifically.

All the same, there is not much written on the subject of a biblical theology of clothing for the Baptist tradition which puts the subject in uncharted waters. Jung Hoon Kim in his dissertation entitled “The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus” confirmed this when speaking of the clothing imagery in Paul’s six letters:

The imagery relates to the entirety of the Christian's life, as it speaks of a baptismal change in his identity, an ethical change in his practical life, and the resurrection transfiguration of his mode of existence. Despite this importance, however, no comprehensive study of the Pauline clothing imagery has yet been undertaken. The references to this imagery are only found in commentaries, dictionaries, short articles, and various other books, in a summary fashion.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jung Hoon Kim, “The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus,” PhD diss. University of Glasgow, 1998. The dissertation was published in 2004 by T&T Clark Int’l. See also, Martin Connell, “Clothing the Body of Christ” *Worship* 85 (2011), 129.

Martin Connell also alludes to this void of attention to a theology of clothing in his research on clothing in the first-century church, “In four decades of the reform of Roman Catholic worship after Vatican II, even as many Christian communities maintain distinctive clothing for ministers and new members, virtually no critical attention has been accorded the New Testament witness about Jesus’ or the first-century church’s clothing.”<sup>21</sup> There have been some impacts made to address the issue although resources specifically discussing a biblical theology of clothing are still nominal.

A rudimentary premise to begin the analysis of the challenge is to reflect on an understanding of theology and making meaning of God through the lens of an African American faith tradition – particularly the Black Baptist church. Beginning at this point is to build upon the fact that theology of clothing is not well articulated because theology in general is not clearly defined in a way that laypersons (and some clergy for that matter) are comfortable talking about it. In other words, because the word theology is not used explicitly at Berean, laypersons are unaware that they are doing theology, there is no connection. Conceivably an underlying hindrance for the lack of circulation of theology among youth leaders at Berean is the result of the inconsistent manner in which African Americans developed their faith traditions and church cultures.

A popular belief among African Americans in the Baptist church is the notion that the biblical text provided for many African slaves a means of faith seeking understanding whereby they were able to associate themselves in the text. This is theological as the African slaves came to embrace God the Savior, the Liberator, the God who brought them out of darkness and into the marvelous light. Anthony Pinn, scholar and professor of Religious Studies posits that the Africans, brought to America as slaves, desired to find

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<sup>21</sup> Martin F. Connell, “Clothing the Body of Christ: An Inquiry about the Letters of Paul” *Worship* 85 (2011), 129.

their place in the created order based on the biblical text in his book *What is African American Religion?*<sup>22</sup> The book of Genesis suggested a theological framework providing parameters to define the nature and character of Africans in the creation story – God created all humankind. In essence, Pinn is saying this shared creation did not prevent white supremacy from emerging by English Christians who had to come to terms with the fact that Africans shared the same creator according to the biblical text.

Theology in and of itself is a like a tree with many branches. The list is exhaustive of how theology is constructed based on one's hermeneutic or social location or "making sense of their world." For example, there is womanist theology which is representative of how black women make meaning or speak about God, *mujerista* theology which is reflective of Hispanic women, a branch of Latina feminist theology.<sup>23</sup> The theology of the hammer is where Habitat for Humanity has its groundwork.<sup>24</sup> Possibly another way of distinguishing theological constructs is the particular social, cultural, political, economic and historical forces at work that cohabit with our Christian theology. Dean and Root really give credence to this thought – they emphasize that theology starts with a crisis. Their theory proposes the very fact that God has broken in to make Godself known in humanity is a crisis.<sup>25</sup> It is a dialectical crisis when we consider an infinite God meeting with finite human beings. I visualize this concept -- womanist theology emerged out of crisis where Black women were left out of the feminist theological equation, or as Stephanie Mitchem frames Delores Williams' description, "a necessity of a theological

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<sup>22</sup> A. Pinn, *African American Religion*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Jones and Lakeland, *Constructing Theology*, 298.

<sup>24</sup> For information on the work of Habitat of Humanity and theology of the hammer see Millard Fuller, *The Theology of the Hammer* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Root and Dean, *Theological Turn*, 82.

analysis beyond that of White women;<sup>26</sup> black liberation theology emerged out of crisis as black people sought to see themselves free in relationship with God and the biblical text as well as the blackness of Christ for identity.

Hence, the crisis revealed through this demonstration project is the need to present a biblical theology of clothing, particularly skin as clothing and spiritual clothing due to the revelation of how our teenage girls are suffering on the inside with low self-esteem, identity crisis, not liking who they are, insecure, experiencing guilt and shame and not seeing themselves as *imago dei*. The connection to the image of God within them is disconnected. Many of our teenage girls are in crisis and unaware of the intangible clothing, the innerwear they put on to mask their emotions and attitudes. There are positive spiritual clothes and there are negative spiritual clothes and awareness of these intangible garments is critical to bring about transformation. The Apostle Paul tells us through baptism we take off the old garments of sin and put on the new garments of salvation and become new creatures in Christ (cf. Colossians 3:9-10, Ephesians 4:22, I Corinthians 5:17). Teenage girls do not recognize that the garments they are putting over their suffering are garments of heaviness, garments of fear and rejection which have great impacts on their outerwear choices. Ultimately, from the research, the lack of understanding of theology and praxis by youth leaders, or the fact that they do not realize the work of ministry they are doing is theological will prevent them from being in a position to discuss a theology of clothing with the teenage girls/youth they minister or teach.

I will argue that a theology of clothing is not well articulated because it is not conversant; it has not been specifically identified or written about in the broad spectrum

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<sup>26</sup>Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 4.

in Christian education in Black Baptist faith traditions. In other words, in the Baptist tradition descriptions of clothing are mentioned or presented in Sunday School lessons or in Bible study such as Joseph's coat of many colors (Genesis 37), the design of the priestly garments (Exodus 39), or the lots cast for Jesus' clothes at the cross (Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, John 19:23), yet theology of clothing is not the descriptive given to what is being studied. The project I propose is opening a new portal for spiritual pedagogy and theological development around clothing and fashion.

### **Youth Leaders Not Given Exposure to Theologies of Clothing**

Youth leaders are not given exposure to theologies of clothing because no one considered the specificity of the subject to discuss it. As has been rightly pointed out, theology of clothing is a new trajectory for Berean and relatively new for the Baptist convention overall. I can relate to this perspective because theology of clothing was never a thought before engaging in this project even though the metaphors and mentioning of clothes in the Bible are present. To make meaning of associating clothing with faith and God and to connect the cultural, contextual and theological studies with and for youth has not been designed as of yet. This new trajectory is a major contributor to the theology of clothing not being exposed to youth leaders.

#### *What are youth leaders' capabilities of understanding theology?*

The role of the youth leader is to not only teach youth in Bible Study, Sunday School and Youth Church, but to serve as an advocate for youth in the larger body of the congregation. Not only that, youth leaders sometimes take on the role of listeners and guidance counselors who intervene on behalf of youth and their families in crisis situations, in decisions pertaining to schools, and social services, if necessary. Their teaching is heightened beyond the Sunday School lesson with life lessons. In some cases,

youth leaders take on the role of “othermothers” for the youth and assumed familial relationships with them since many of them come to church without parents, and many do not live with parents. Womanism defines this act of “othermother” or “mama-consciousness” as traditional communalism.<sup>27</sup> Nancy Westfield illustrates this poignantly in the example of Pharaoh’s daughter (whose name is unknown) in the biblical text found in Exodus 2. She posits, “Although we do not know her name, we know the way she acted. We know that she was willing to look into the face of a doomed infant, hear his cries, and take him into her own home.”<sup>28</sup> African American women have done this for centuries and the Black church is without exception. It is in the Black church that many youth are nurtured, educated and reared by both men and women. Several of the men in our church have taken on the role of surrogate father to some of the teenage girls and young adults. The same is the case with programs offered at the church that are not spiritually or religiously centered (e.g. Berean Drumline and Girl Scouts), the youth leaders demonstrate the same level of commitment to the youth – desirous to see them excel and be whole.

More than any program or event, youth leaders are expected to exemplify what it means to be fully devoted to Christ. This also requires becoming active participants in the spiritual formation of youth. They are expected to work together for the common goal of spiritually enriching the lives of youth who come to the church. Kreasy Dean adds that creating communities of spiritual practice have made a noticeable change in youth ministry in the twenty-first century. She posits, “In the Christian community, practices

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<sup>27</sup> Traditional communalism is one of the womanist tenets proclaimed by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* and expounded upon in Nancy Lynne Westfield’s essay “Mama Why?...” in Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas ed. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (New York: New York University Press: 2006), 128-139.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.130.

that imitate the self-giving love of God shape relationships that echo Christ's love.<sup>29</sup> In other words, youth leaders are expected to go beyond the boundaries of programs and events to communities which are reflective of Christian practices. Researchers investigating adolescent spirituality agree that community plays an important role in adolescent development and religious congregations in particular. Involvement in a congregation provides benefits and opportunities for adolescents such as socializing with peers, reinforcement of moral values and attitudes conducive to positive, healthy behaviors, and protection from peer pressure associated with undesirable behaviors.<sup>30</sup> Youth leaders are also expected to be prepared and familiar with the subjects and scriptural passages they are presenting or teaching.

Berean's youth leaders reflect a kaleidoscope of both male and female participants with age ranges between 21 and 80 years old. The majority of youth leaders have completed college, and a few are currently teachers with years of experience in the public school system or retired teachers. Their faithfulness and commitment to serving youth is evident in the way they are always present for them, the care they give in providing creative space, and the thoughtfulness that goes into seeing youth learn. Ironically, I contend that the same attention youth leaders show to youth is not the same attention given to their personal spiritual growth and theological learning beyond the lessons they prepare to teach. This is a critical moment of observation weighing in on their commitment to youth, their lives outside of church, and being able to manage time or create balance. Thus, the busyness of church work can become the tyranny of the urgent instead of the practice of being in the presence of God.

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<sup>29</sup> Root and Dean, *Theological Turn*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Sangwon Kim, Giselle B. Esquivel, "Adolescent Spirituality and Resilience: Theory, Research, and Educational Practices" *Psychology in the Schools* 48 no.7 (2011), 762.

The constraints are not about the capabilities of youth leaders, they are educated and learned. I argue the constraints are twofold: first, the investment of time – time they set aside for themselves to focus on receiving theological information outside of adult Bible Study or Sunday School. Many are not making this time intentional and when the opportunities to create a specified time solely for youth leaders to study the Bible together, other priorities take precedence. Secondly, I consider the particularity in which to teach the scriptures contextually. In *Sticky Faith*, the authors emphasize this point: “as leaders – not to mention followers of Jesus – we need to keep wrestling with the meaning of the gospel until we pin down some answers. Our lack of clarity about the “good news” is mirrored and magnified in our students.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, if youth leaders do not understand the biblical text, how will youth embrace the text or have faith in the text?

### **Teenage Girls Are Not Given Sufficient Exposure to Theologies of Clothing**

A critical question for me to investigate, which is what brought the genesis of this project to materialization, is how do teenage girls develop a positive identity, build self-esteem and understand body consciousness in lieu of a healthy understanding of theologies of clothing? Berean has had a phenomenal record of engaging youth through youth ministry for decades. The socio-religious environment is possibly the critical factor that helped the church successfully keep youth coming. Amazingly this socio-religious context may very well be the reason that many attend church, not because they are compelled to do so. Having worked with the youth ministry for the past two years, I observed the dichotomy in infusing more of the religious and diffusing the social aspects to bring newness through theological development with youth in Berean. On the other hand, connecting the socio-religious experience at Berean with helping teenage girls’

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<sup>31</sup> Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-term Faith in Teenagers* (Youth Worker Edition) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 29.

shape or form their spirituality presents a real challenge to youth leaders because of the inability to name their own theology or how they shape their spirituality. Evelyn Parker describes spirituality as it relates to teenage girls as their way of knowing and existing in the world that inform and shape their beliefs in God, the values they embrace, and the practices they manifest.<sup>32</sup> She defines what spirituality is in light of the effects of oppression by racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism on adolescent females. Adults have a tendency to forget what their own lives were like as adolescents and what the epochs of their day meant in the formation of their development. Without this recollection, it is difficult to cultivate a space for teenage girls to know, and be in in the church, and in the world. They will continue to face judgment and criticism about what they do, say, wear, and eat, as opposed to experiencing and hearing the transformative words that bring meaning to their voices, identity and who they are in God as outlined in the biblical text, and demonstrated through the lives of the adults/youth leaders who lead them.

Patricia Davis, in her book *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls* is candid through her research analysis that a girl's spirituality is never separate from the environment in which she grows. She advocates, "Spirituality develops out of relationship with important people and communities as well as with God."<sup>33</sup> In other words, girls' spiritualties are shaped and understood in the context of the teachings of the biblical text, in addition to addressing life and community issues. As youth leaders, the position is not to complain about what teenage girls are dressed in, or what lifestyles they

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<sup>32</sup> Evelyn L Parker, ed. *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class and Gender* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 9.

choose to live out. It is more important to reflect on the intersecting realities that have teenage girls in a quandary, and cause them to be undecided about which way to proceed and be prepared to help them navigate their decisions. African American teenage girls at Berean are not given the exposure to theology of clothing primarily for the same reason youth leaders are not exposed – it is not yet developed in the curriculum or in the broader discourse in church culture. Through my observation of youth ministry and data collection from youth leaders and teenage girls, it was clear that familiarity and association with theologies of clothing are not present.

### **The Devil Really Wears Prada**

Through study, I observed the disjointedness between the youth and adult population and why it is important to prepare the next generation of youth leaders. I agree with Kim and Esquivel that developing spirituality in youth involves building positive, lasting relationships, with members of the clergy and adults in their faith community.<sup>34</sup> The mutuality, spirituality and particularity around the issue of helping teenage girls dress from the inside out is fluid and stands to reason why the challenge is evident in my church. This signifies an opportunity to raise the consciousness of adults as it pertains to shaping the spirituality of teenage girls. Evelyn Parker quotes scholar and cultural critic Henry Giroux, “how a society understands its youth is partly determined by how it represents them.”<sup>35</sup> A small group session and survey with the Associate Ministers at Berean provided confirmation to the aforementioned statement – there is a need for youth leaders and the leadership of the church to be informed and capable of discussing theology with youth, in addition to creating space for dialogue about spirituality.

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<sup>34</sup> Kim and Esquivel, “Adolescent” 762.

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Parker quotes Henry A. Giroux, *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 58 in *Sacred Selves*, 46-47.

One of the questions asked on the survey to the Associate Ministers was: how do you imagine theologies being taught at young stages so the youth can have access to them? One of the male Associate Ministers and teacher of the children's Sunday School class answered:

Theology can be taught to children through English grammar, Mathematics, and through various other modes similar to the way in which the world indoctrinates its children with certain values. If Paolo Freire taught a number of illiterate, oppressed, Latin American adults to read using a political text, instructors should be able to teach the young theology in stages.

A response to the same question from a female Associate Minister who teaches the teen Sunday School class was thus:

During Sunday School and Youth Church, pamphlets, going deep in the study of Genesis – the book of beginnings regarding Adam and Eve seeking to get wisdom, glory and understanding before they were ready for it and to handle its consequences.

More interestingly than this however, is the unfamiliarity teenage girls (13-15 years old) have identifying their spirituality, understanding the biblical text and their relationship with God. Many teenage girls appreciate participating in worship and contributing their gifts and talents in ministry at the church. An eagerness to perform, to dance or sing and to compete in a drumline tournament is a typical response for the occasion. To the contrary, many of the girls do not express a desire for theological development or for a platform to speak against injustices that affect their lives or that of other girls. Parker asserts, "...a healthy spirituality for a girl is one that resists those powers that seek to dehumanize her."<sup>36</sup> The body-conscious culture we are living in emphasizes body appearances, fashion and nudity have blinded the minds of African American teenage girls (at Berean in particular) from seeing the dehumanizing effect that is taking place within them.

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<sup>36</sup> Parker, *Sacred Selves*, 170.

The womanist theology tenet, redemptive self-love, counters the self-degradation of Black women. Alice Walker describes the womanist love ethic as, “Loves love and food and roundness. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless.”<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, many that receive negative messages about their physical attractiveness have learned to devalue other girls within their ethnic group who resemble the African aesthetic – full lips, broad nose, kinky hair, and dark skin.<sup>38</sup> Many teenage girls today have disassociated themselves with Africa in spite of the natural look that is prevalent in today’s culture. However, I wrestled with the missing focus of the inclusiveness of Black girls in the womanist theological discourse. Educate girls at an early age with a sense of self. Feminist bell hooks argues: “when we heal the woundedness inside us, when we attend to the … inner love-seeking, love-starved child, we make ourselves ready to enter more fully into community.”<sup>39</sup> Jesus Christ commands that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matt 22:39, Mark 12:31). The lack of self-love among African American teenage girls is prevalent in the African American community. However, one would expect that faith in God and Christ would dismantle the strongholds that intercept or prevent self-love from flourishing.

Issues concerning body image, identity and self-esteem among teenage girls have manifested themselves within the church culture, as well as within the context of what it is to be made in the image and likeness of God. Theologian Michelle Gonzalez alludes

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<sup>37</sup> Walker, *Gardens*, xi.

<sup>38</sup> See Shantal I. Thomas, “African Adolescent Females: An Investigation of Racial Identity, Skin Color, and Self-Concept During Adolescent Development.” PhD diss. Kent State University, 2006; D.A. Azibo, “Treatment and Training Implications of the Advances in Personality Theory” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 14 no.1 (1990), 53-65; H. Morgan, “Race Preference Studies: A Critique of Methodology” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 15 no.4 (1991), 248-253.

<sup>39</sup> bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1993), 146-147.

how patriarchy in the biblical text perpetuated God's image as male which excludes women and girls from the equation. She argues, "Our youth are challenging us to reassess some traditional Christian habits – particularly those that stem from a patriarchal past and outdated customs."<sup>40</sup> Existentially, the image of God in relation to their (teenage girls) personhood is not present. Aligning this thought with the womanist tenet of redemptive self-love, teenage girls need encouragement to love the skin they are in. Redemptive self-love refers to, in part, the admiration and celebration of the distinctive and identifiable beauty of Black women. It is honoring "my black is beautiful" and that it is alright to be Black and female.<sup>41</sup> Jesus taught the greatest command saying: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-40). The crisis that I am witnessing among black teenage girls is that they do not love the skin they are in, yet this is the first layer of clothing/covering that God has dressed humanity in.

### *Resources*

There were six members chosen to serve on the Site Team: two are youth leaders at Berean, two affiliated with community youth organizations, two are parents with vested interest in youth, three are members of Berean, three non-members, two male and four female, but all are Christians. They were all instructed of their role and responsibility as a Site Team member. We met occasionally via conference call in the beginning stages to discuss some of the issues concerning teenage girls and clothing and how to best structure the project. Seemingly, because theology of clothing is a new genre for all of

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<sup>40</sup> Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Breaking the Habits of Machismo" *Sojourners* (January, 2014), 16 -20.

<sup>41</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper Shades*, 142.

the members, my primary strategy focused on researching and learning what others were saying about theology(ies) of clothing.

Our church has the resources to invest in the project as well as trained ministry leaders who can help develop a training curriculum for the theological development of youth leaders that will include an introduction to theology of clothing. Notwithstanding, the Youth Pastor is also a member on the Site Team and is in favor of bringing a more deliberate training component to the youth leaders' monthly meetings and has articulated the need to make it a requirement for youth leaders going forward.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### **Research Question 1 (Biblical/Theological) - Constructing Biblical Theologies of Clothing: The Tangible and Intangible Garments**

##### **What are the theologies of clothing?**

The primary focus of this thesis is clothing – the tangible and intangible. But specifically the intangible, and how they impact the lives and attitudes of African American teenage girls. Research has shown there is a correlation between the way women/teenage girls feel and the clothing they choose to wear.<sup>42</sup> In essence, I am constructing a theology of clothing that is reflective of the title of the discourse: *Styled by God: A Girl's Guide to Dressing from the Inside Out*. This question correlates with my first goal – to create awareness for myself to understand the theologies of clothing.

The Bible provides a plethora of scriptural references and case studies to begin to construct a theology of clothing. In this section, I explore theology of clothing or covering in the Bible from three different perspectives: skin as clothing, fabric as clothing intersecting Islamic and Judaic norms for women and girls, and spiritual virtues as clothing. I will also explore what the early church fathers, mainly Tertullian, had to say about clothing as it pertains to women and faith.

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<sup>42</sup> For further details about the psychology of fashion and the effects of mood on clothing choices, see Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992); Jennifer Baumgarten, [blog] “The Psychology of Fashion: A Clinical Analysis of Fashion Week” *Psychology Today* 2012) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-psychology-dress/201202/the-psychology-fashion> (accessed March 10, 2015); Claudia Williams, “The Psychology of Fashion” *DrakeMagazine.com* (May 2014) <http://www.drakemagazine.com/the-psychology-of-fashion> (accessed March 10, 2015); Emma N. Banister, Margaret K. Hogg “Negative Symbolic consumption and consumers drive for self-esteem: The Case of the Fashion Industries” *European Journal of Marketing* 38 no. 7 (2004), 850-898.

### *Skin as Clothing*

I begin the construction of a theology of clothing using the first layer of covering – skin as clothing – and the Garden of Eden as a putative place to start. The creation story in the book of Genesis 1:26 reads, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...’” So God created the male and female in God’s own image (v.27). In my prophetic imagination, this passage sets off the inaugural arrival of God wrapping Godself in flesh, the duality of God being with us and within us – the very essence of God, Wisdom and the Word breathed into the humans God created. For theologian Karl Barth, this divine essence is the intra-Trinitarian community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> We see the imagery of this clearer in Genesis 2:7 which states, God formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Hebrew word for skin is *owr* meaning naked or animal skin. *Owr* can be extended to mean the outer covering of the body or the whole body. Skin is the body’s largest and fastest-growing organ stretching about twenty square feet, weighing about nine pounds and constantly renewing itself. The skin is thinnest on the eyelids and behind the ears. Skin is the body’s main form of protection that shelters our insides from germs.<sup>44</sup> The Godhead wrapped Itself in skin and became a living and transcendent being. An analogous summation of God coming in the flesh is found in John 1:1-3, 14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...

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<sup>43</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* III.1, Ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance, Trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, H. Knight (London: T & T Clark, 1958), 182.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.americanskin.org/resource/>. (accessed February, 16, 2015).

As the “Word” God assumes the flesh of humanity through Jesus Christ being born of a woman. To be made in the image of God indicates that the DNA of God is present in humanity and signifies the continued incarnation of God manifesting through us and dwelling among us. Alastair Roberts asserts, in Christ, God assumes the garment of the creation most fully, clothing Godself in flesh, filling that garment with his glory. In the Church Christ is fashioning us into a perfect and spotless garment.<sup>45</sup> The imagery depicted from the context of the above comment is that of a spotless garment without wrinkles, the garment that Christians are expected to be wearing when Christ returns for his glorious or radiant church (Eph 5:25-27).

Job refers to being wrapped in skin by God as he decried to his friends during his time of trouble in Job 10:8. This conversation with his friends is speculative of what Job would say to God if God were listening:

Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me?  
Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?  
Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin  
and knit me together with bones and sinews?

Theologically, Job understood that God was the Creator of life and that God is the one who initiated, on the loom of life, the design for skin as covering. Yet Job’s skin had been afflicted.

A theology of clothing derived from skin as clothing brings meaning to our relationship with the triune God through the assurance that God is not only the signature, the brand on our label indicating that we are part of the family of God, but it also brings knowledge that God is still wrapped in humanity within each of us. In other cases in the Bible, God or the Spirit of God “came on” individuals (e.g. Judges 6:34, now the Spirit of

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<sup>45</sup> Alastair Roberts [blog] “A Biblical Theology of Clothing” Confessing Evangelical <http://confessingeangelical.com/2011/09/09/guest-post-a-biblical-theology-of-clothing/>. (accessed February 3, 2014).

the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; I Chronicles 12:18, then the Spirit came on Amasai, chief of the Thirty and he spoke; and 2 Chronicles 24:20, then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest and he stood before the people and spoke) like a garment with power and authority.<sup>46</sup> These texts give insight to God's Spirit being dressed with the body of the individuals. Kim further conjectures, "God's intention is to enable a man to have divine power in warfare. God's Spirit puts on a specific human being as his clothing in order to empower that person."<sup>47</sup> The theology of skin as clothing is humanity providing covering for the divine. In other words, the color of one's skin does not matter; the Triune God is housed within. Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Roberts posits an eschatological point in that God's relationship with the world is interwoven or bound up in a theology of clothing—God wears the creation like a garment and later discards of it when it is old to replace it with a more glorious one.<sup>48</sup> This is likened to what Christians are taught to consider in relation to the transfigurative garments that will be worn when Christ returns, for the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable (I Corin 15:53). Yet, the research shows that many African American teenage girls do not love or like the skin they are in whether God is there or not.

### ***How Theology of Clothing as Skin Impacts African-American Teenage Girls***

Teenage girls can easily be constrained by a constant focus on the exterior which is impactful to their interior growth and self-esteem. In other words, there are a number

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<sup>46</sup> Kim, "Clothing Significance," 28.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>48</sup> Roberts, "A Biblical Theology."

of sources that can be held accountable or to whom we can point fingers at for the injurious levels in which African American teenage girls find their self-esteem positioned. A case can be made with the media for example. Advertisers over time have used women with lighter skin tones, with thin bodies, and long, flowing straight hair to represent products and services. The media has been issuing a mandate as to how women and girls should look, which in the long run created an abysmal stereotype – a stereotype that negates the beauty of the variety of skin tones African American women and teenage girls possess, a stereotype that subliminally pronounces lighter skin as better; or the stereotype that portrays half-naked, butt-jiggling African American women and girls as normative. What these portrayals have caused for African American teenage girls who do not fit the mold is self-abnegation, self-image disorder, and identity crisis. The negative portrayals, the issues with colorism used by media and embedded in the culture are harmful and detrimental for healthy identities and self-esteem. Although debilitating, African American women and girls have begun to resist the oppressive imagery and create informative spaces, organizations and pedagogies to rise above the lies that have been told for decades.<sup>49</sup>

I watched the phenomena of self-esteem and self-image disorder<sup>50</sup> unfold in several documentaries I viewed while conducting research for this project. Kiri Davis, a 17 year old film student, produced a seven minute documentary in 2005, *A Girl Like Me*, that re-creates the famous experiment by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark - an experiment

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<sup>49</sup> Tracy L. Robinson, Janie Victoria Ward, “African American Adolescents and Skin Color” *Journal of Black Psychology* 21 no. 3 (1995), 256-275. See also Susan Kaiser, Leslie Rabine, Carol Hall, Karyl Ketchum, “Beyond Binaries: Respecting the Improvisation in African-American Style” *Black Style* Carol Bulloch, ed. (London: V&A Publications, 2004), 50-66.

<sup>50</sup> I learned of self-image disorder from the documentary *The Souls of Black Girls* by Daphne Valerius (2008) where Michaela Angela Davis, Jada Pinkett and Regina King used it to describe the way Black women and girls suffer in trying to attain the White standard of beauty that society and the media have perpetuated.

where Black children were presented with two dolls – a white one and a black one. The children were asked, “Show me which doll is the good one... the bad one,” and they would select the white one as good, and the black one as bad. The children were also asked, “Which one was the prettiest, and the ugliest?” or “Which one was the smartest and the dumbest,” and in each case the white doll was selected as the smartest, nicest, and prettiest, while the black doll was the dumbest, ugliest and bad.<sup>51</sup> The Davis documentary generated renewed interest in young children’s skin tone preferences, because it suggested that several generations later Black U.S. children continue to have negative views about their skin tone and demonstrate strong preferences for White over Black skin tones.<sup>52</sup> The implication also indicates that colorism is still alive and active and in the minds and attitudes of Black youth.

In 2011, Bill Duke and D. Channsin Berry produced *Dark Girls*, another documentary that focused on colorism among Black people and the impact it has on identity and self-esteem in women and girls, in addition to how the media has determined or defined what beauty is.<sup>53</sup> (I use Black people when speaking globally and in this instance because it not only pertains to African Americans, but Black people in general.) The culture of disparity between light-skin and dark-skin has risen to the forefront again in this generation. Colorism is a form of oppression expressed through the differential treatment of individuals within the group because of the color of their skin.<sup>54</sup> In the documentary, we get a glimpse at how Black people, particularly those with darker skin,

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<sup>51</sup> *A Girl Like Me* by Kiri Davis, Director, an Indie Film, 2005. (accessed December 30, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Phillip Jordan, Maria Hernandez-Reif, “Reexamination of Young Children’s Racial Attitudes and Skin Tone Preferences” *Journal of Black Psychology*, 35 no. 3 (August 2009), 390.

<sup>53</sup> *Dark Girls*, Bill Duke and D. Channsin Berry Directors. Duke Media, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> For more on colorism and its origins see “On Dark Girls” by The Association of Black Psychologists (June 2013). <http://goo.gl/ulQuQB> (accessed February 2015).

are subjected to trauma because of their skin color, and how the approximation of whiteness is valued around the world. White is associated with weddings and black with death, white with purity and black with dirty or evil. Dissatisfaction and disdain for their skin tone has led many black women to bleach their skin. The media also uses technology to lighten the skin tone of darker women who grace magazine and CD covers which in essence says that Black is not beautiful.

Daphne Valerius' methodology in *The Souls of Black Girls*, allows the viewer to appreciate the richness of their own image struggles through the voices of women and girls (and men) about the impacts and effects of colorism.<sup>55</sup> Actors Regina King and Jada Pinkett Smith, image activist Michaela Angela Davis, journalist Gwen Ifill, and rapper/author Chuck D are among the participants in the film who provided insights on the deteriorating self-image African-American women and girls are experiencing, and how important affirming their inner and outer beauty is. Chuck D stated, "Your inside is your battery to your outside." In other words, the inner beauty, the inner strength permeates the outward reflection of identity. What happens on the inside gives life and depth to the outside.

Also in *Souls*, two critical themes emerge from the dialogues that include (1) defining what is beautiful and who influences what beauty is; and (2) how can we (the Black community) help our girls overcome self-image disorder? The European standard of beauty is unattainable for African American girls because no matter what anyone does to the outside to attain that standard of beauty, the inner spirit is left confused and negated of identity. There is so much emphasis placed on the exterior of a person – what they are wearing, what they look like and not the inner feelings. One of the women

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<sup>55</sup> *The Souls of Black Girls*, Written and directed by Daphne Valerius. Femme Noire Productions, 2008.

interviewed in the documentary, Pam Edwards, Fashion and Beauty Editor at *Essence* magazine, stated that twelve year olds have no examples of “how I can be just a pretty girl.” I agree with Edwards, because I have not found magazines to share with African American teenage girls that they can look at and see themselves reflected positively.

Accordingly, Malcolm X emphatically speaks about this issue of self-image disorder in 1962 (although it was not called that) at a gathering with an audience of Black people in Los Angeles:

Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin to such extent that you bleach your skin to get like the white man? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to so much so that you don't want to be around each other? No... Before you come asking Mr. Muhammad does he teach hate, you should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what God gave you.<sup>56</sup>

These words remind me of what God asked Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, “who told you that you were naked?” (Gen. 3:11) as they covered their nakedness, their created form and existence by God in shame. Malcolm’s words sting, and yet just as they were pertinent for the crowds in 1962, they are still relevant today because the definition of beauty in America has left many African American and Black teenage girls suffering identity crises especially if they are dark or brown skinned.

I attribute assimilation and the propaganda continuously used by the media for African Americans feeling inferior and reminded of their worthlessness well after chattel slavery. Tom Burrell, an advertising expert and former ad agency owner, posits it this way, “Given the centuries of brainwashing that equated Black with ugly, inferior and undesirable, it really isn’t surprising that many Black children – like their parents and

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<sup>56</sup> This clip shows part of a speech given by Malcolm X speaking to a congregation on May 5, 1962 in Los Angeles. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRSgUTWffMQ>. (accessed January 2, 2015).

generations of Blacks before them – reject their own image.”<sup>57</sup> Burrell describes the self-image disorder as the Black inferiority complex. There is a job to be done to help African American teenage girls cast off the myths and stereotypes about their blackness and their bodies which has been presented to them as truth and set them on a path of rediscovering how valuable and worthy they are because they are created in the image of God.

Consequently, skin as clothing raises a theological issue – the issue of nakedness and its relationship with sin and shame. The church’s efforts to address the self-image disorder many African American teen girls suffer from today needs to be more robust and intentional in order that girls who wrestle to embrace the skin they are endowed with might shift their shameful thoughts to embrace *imago dei*. Additionally, the pedagogy of blackness in the Bible is another critical step to address with African American teenage girls in order to bolster their identity consciousness and enable them to recognize oneness with the Triune God.

### **The Role of Nakedness and Its Relationship with Sin and Shame in Theology of Skin as Clothing**

Several theological debates pertaining to the nakedness of Adam and Eve on account of sin emerge. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his article “The Lost Dress of Paradise: A Theology of Nakedness” posits, “According to the theologians, despite the fact that Adam and Eve were not covered in skin before the fall, they were still not naked. They were covered in a dress of mercy, of tight-fitting glory.”<sup>58</sup> Nicholas Constas, former Associate professor of theology at Harvard Divinity contributes that

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<sup>57</sup> Tom Burrell. *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority* (Carlsbad: Smiley, 2010, 68. See also, Janie Victoria Ward, *The Skin We’re In: Teaching Our Children to be Emotionally Strong, Socially Smart, Spiritually Connected* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “The Lost Dress of Paradise: A Theology of Nakedness.” Christian Nilsson, trans. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/the-lost-dress-of-paradise/>. (accessed January 4, 2015).

early Christian exegesis on the subject of sacred clothing asserts Adam and Eve were said to be originally clothed in robes of glory and light. At the Fall, they were stripped of these robes and clothed in garments of skin (Genesis 3:22).<sup>59</sup> C.H. Kang and Ethel Nelson in *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language*, demonstrates through stylized pictographs how Adam and Eve were robed in a glorious light with flames of fire jutting from them representing their being clothed with fire covering their earthliness.<sup>60</sup> The reoccurring theological themes from the literature review reveal the state of Adam and Eve as beings without the type of human skin we identify with today. Yet, humanity will always be naked before God. Does that make nakedness sinful or something to be ashamed of?

Religious doctrines have interpreted nakedness as shameful and sinful without regard to cultural differences or the axiology of ethnic groups. The scripture says in Genesis 1, everything that God made was good and God was pleased with creation because God said so. I cannot envision Adam and Eve discussing anything unnatural or erroneous about their existence, their bodies, their nakedness or their looks. They ate the food of the earth, tended the garden and the animals and spent time with their Creator. The dialectical tension develops around the difference of being naked and unashamed in Genesis 2:25 and seeing themselves naked and ashamed in 3:7. After Adam and Eve ate from the tree God commanded them not to, their eyes were opened and they noticed something different about themselves – they were naked and now ashamed of it (Gen 3:7). One commentary indicated Adam and Eve were unashamed of their nakedness

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<sup>59</sup> Nicolas P. Constas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the *Theotokos*, and the Loom of the Flesh,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 no. 2 (1995), 169-194.

<sup>60</sup> C. H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis: How the Truths of Genesis Were Found Hidden in the Chinese Language* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 52.

because they were still in an uncivilized status.<sup>61</sup> I disagree with that. Nakedness in and of itself is not a state of being uncivilized, we are all born naked. Nakedness is a cultural issue – it depends on which side of the equator one lives. I concur with Dan Lé in his book *The Naked Christ: An Atonement Model for a Body Obsessed Culture* that shame associated with nakedness does not exist in every culture.<sup>62</sup> Europeans came to Africa and all the countries below the equator and saw the natives naked or scantily dressed in leaves, and deemed them uncivilized. Kelly Brown Douglas confirms this in *Sexuality and the Black Church*. She describes how the naked bodies of African women and men impressed the European travelers with the idea that the Africans were a libidinous people, sexually linked with apes.<sup>63</sup>

While visiting Hawaii, my nephew shared with me when the protestant missionaries came to the island dating back to Captain Cook in the 1800s, they made the women wear moo moos (or muu muus) to cover their naked breasts and bodies. This is confirmed in Julia Flynn Siler's book, *The Lost Kingdom: Hawaii's Last Queen, the Sugar Kings, and America's First Imperial Adventure*. The New Englanders were not in touch with the culture of the islanders and despised their half-nakedness. She affirms, "The appearance of destitution, degradation and barbarism among the chattering, almost naked savages, whose heads and feet and much of their sunburnt swarthy skin were bare, was appalling to the Rev. Hiram Bingham who wrote. "Can these be human beings?"<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Lé, *The Naked Christ: An Atonement Model for a Body Obsessed Culture* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012), 35.

<sup>63</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 33.

<sup>64</sup> Julia Flynn Siler, *Hawaii's Last Queen, the Sugar Kings, and America's First Imperial Adventure* (New York: Atlanta Monthly Press, 2012), 4.

The act of disobedience by Adam and Eve ignited a ripple effect to the point that nakedness is still an issue in many cultures and religions. In fact, according to Gwen Neville, because of this act of disobedience women's bodies have been sources of embarrassment to theologians since the beginning of theology itself.<sup>65</sup> She continued, Eve was the guilty one in the Fall and that women are assigned to the realm of the wicked and unclean throughout the Old Testament.<sup>66</sup> Augustine discusses the "discovery" of Adam and Eve's nakedness after living with their nakedness without shame as a result of lust. His exegetical inference from Genesis 2:25 disclosed Adam and Eve as knowing they were naked, they were not blind, but nakedness was not disgraceful and lust had not yet aroused their members.<sup>67</sup> The magnitude of the act of disobedience by Adam and Eve transcends the biblical text and invades our societal norms. Subsequently, we see repercussions of looking upon nakedness as sinful in the story of Noah. After the flood when the ark landed, Noah got drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. When his son Ham discovered his father's condition, he told his brothers. They in turn covered their father without looking upon his nakedness and were blessed. Ham on the other hand had his son Canaan cursed by Noah. It was this curse on Canaan that Black people have been taught to believe their ethnic origins and black skin was derived.

For many African-American women and girls it is difficult to look at their naked bodies, to have a relationship with their bodies or to love the skin they are in. The failure to love, honor and accept their bodies by some African-American teenage girls is the crux of this part of the conversation around a theology of skin as clothing. This is the

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<sup>65</sup> Gwen Kennedy Neville, "Women's Bodies and Theology" in *Theology and Body*, John Fenton, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 75.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God* 14.17, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 578.

antithesis of the womanist tenet of redemptive self-love as well as the command of Christ to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:30-31). Burrell quotes feminist and scholar bell hooks in his book *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*:

It is no secret to many of [us] that we have internalized racist/sexist notions of beauty that lead many of us to think that we're ugly. And the media have bombarded us with stories...that white children are cleaner and nicer. The white dominated media presents this knowledge to us as if it's some defect of black life that creates such aberrant and self-negating behavior, not white supremacy.<sup>68</sup>

I experienced hook's sentiment to be true during the two body-image Bible Studies I conducted for teenage girls and youth (there were five boys present). I wanted to know what teenage girls thought about their bodies and who or what influenced their decision. I also wanted to know how many girls were willing to share their most personal feelings out loud. I had the youth draw their body outline. Out of the six girls who participated in teen Bible study, one was satisfied with herself while the others noted a variety of dislikes. When I presented the workshop at the Girl Scout session I recorded: out of the thirteen teenage girls in attendance, three liked what they saw when they looked in the mirror at themselves, two were honest enough to share they did not like what they saw, and the remainder abstained from answering. Whereas I trust the womanist perspective and womanist theology for understanding redemptive self-love, I did however, notice a missing component within womanist literature and discourse – how can girls be involved in the conversation at an early age with the older women to embrace self-love? Womanist ethicist, Toinette Eugene writes of the connections between spirituality and sexuality in

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<sup>68</sup> Burrell quotes bell hooks from Sisters of the Yam in *Brainwashed*, 65.

Black communities and the lack of response by the Black church. She emphasizes that, “a Black liberating love must serve as the linchpin to link Black spirituality and sexuality.”<sup>69</sup>

African-American women and women of color around the globe have taken great strides to embrace self-love to counter the years of conditioning alluding that their bodies were not valued beyond the usage of economic gains. This self-love that Alice Walker defines is a declaration to admire and celebrate the distinctions that make Black women beautiful. The bar for the standard of beauty is raised so high that the ability to reach it by black women and girls has become sort of like a circus employing skin bleaching, cosmetic surgery, straightened hair and weaves. In other words, the standards of beauty in our society have been set according to European standards and by media directives.

### **Fabric as Clothing**

I invited the seventeen Associate Ministers plus the Pastor to participate in a focus group to present the project and to discuss theology of clothing from their vantage point. Eleven of the ministers are women and eight are men. I ended up interviewing the pastor separately, and only three of the women showed up on the assigned date therefore I redesigned it as a small group discussion. For the ministers who could not attend, I sent the same questions out as a questionnaire via email and placed in their church mailboxes – one of the men responded and two women for a total of six ministerial participants. When I asked the question to the ministers at Berean, “Does God care about clothes?” five responded yes, while only one said no. Nevertheless, a dichotomy presents itself that prompts the discourse as to whether God cares about clothing or not. The Bible provides

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<sup>69</sup> Toinette M. Eugene’s “While Love is Unfashionable: Ethical Implications of Black Spirituality and Sexuality” in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition, Readings in Moral Theology*, no.9, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick, S.J. (Mahway: Paulist Press, 1996), 316.

cases where we see the utility of fabric as clothing as identity markers, and various fabrics with different meanings and symbolism.

In this section I discuss fabric as clothing in the biblical text beginning in Genesis 3:21 when God made Adam and Eve garments to wear instead of the fig leaves before they were evicted from the Garden, including the ecclesial garments and clothing as identity markers, and end in Revelation where the apocryphal clothes are discussed. I will also argue the implications of fabric as clothing for Christians and theology.

*First Garments –*

God did not allow Adam and Eve to leave the garden with what they designed to clothe themselves, why not? Why did God need to make something else to cover them with? I wrestled with this concept for some time. In Genesis 3:21 God made garments of skin for Adam and Eve before they left the Garden. Various schools of thought on these garments range from an animal sacrificed for their skin (symbolic of the atoning sacrifice of Christ whose death and resurrection covered the sins of humanity), to leather tunics, and garments of restoration and grace including Barth who asserts, God's clothing of humanity in nakedness is a gift of grace.<sup>70</sup> In my second sermon during the project, the revelation for the God-clothes was grace. I titled the sermon “The Fabric of God’s Grace” based on the Gen 3:21 account. Adam and Eve were created with grace already abounding yet when they made the fig leaves to cover themselves in shame, God made new clothes for them to put on. Conversely, John 1:16 made the profound connection, “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.” Jesus Christ is the grace in place of grace already given. In other words, from the beginning of time, humanity has been covered with grace, but just as the fig leaf was not sufficient

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<sup>70</sup> See Karl Barth, *Dogmatics* 3.1, 307; Kang and Nelson, *The Discovery of*, 76 – 79; Israel Drazin and Stanley Wagner, trans. *Onkelos on the Torah: Be-reshit* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publications, 2006), 21.

coverage for sin, God had to make a new covering which was Godself through Jesus Christ, the new garment that believers put on by faith. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.””

What we are not told in the biblical text is how clothes were produced or why they became distinctive as a necessity or tribal markers except for God’s design of the first garments and the priestly garments. Anthropologists have employed a cross-cultural scope to explore the cultural and symbolic meaning of clothing. Based on historical data, clothes date back to 500,000 – 100,000 BCE where the hides of animals were used and tied with a belt-like strip of hide.<sup>71</sup> It has also been discovered from artifacts found in prehistory to 600 CE the functionality of clothes – with the use of bone sewing needles, reindeer horn buttons and tie closures before the weaver’s loom was created.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Clothing as Identity Markers –*

There are many examples in the Bible where clothes are identity markers. We are not given the origins of styles or construction methods in the biblical text however; some of the examples of clothing as identity markers are as follows:

- Esau’s hairy skin and rustic attire. Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys Esau and Jacob. Esau was born with his whole body like a hairy garment (Gen 25:24-26). Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau which she had in the house along with animal skins and put them on her younger son Jacob in order for Isaac to give

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<sup>71</sup> *Fashion: The Definitive History of Costume and Style*, A Smithsonian Project, Ellen Nanney, Coordinator (London: DK, 2012), 12. See also Jacqueline Morley, Designed by David Salariya, *Clothes for Work, for Play and Display: Timelines* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1991), 6-8.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 14.

Jacob his blessing (vs 15-16). Esau's identity and blessing was stolen as a result of Rebekah dressing Jacob in his brother's clothes.

- Joseph's robes of favor. Jacob made an ornate robe for his son Joseph that identified him as his father's favorite son (Gen 37). The garment created dissension among his brothers who hated him. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and took the robe back to their father after they dipped it in animal blood to convince him that Joseph was dead. A garment that signified honor and privilege was violently stripped away representing the shredding of a family and a body.<sup>73</sup> While enslaved, Joseph, finds favor with the Pharaoh after interpreting his dream, who later puts him in charge of the country. Pharaoh dressed Joseph in robes of fine linen, put a gold chain around his neck, and placed his signet ring on his finger. This new attire identified Joseph as one with authority and power. Interestingly, both robes were given to Joseph by father figures who saw something special in Joseph.

- The Prophets' Attire. The prophets wore garments that distinguished them in their office. Usually the garment consisted of a coarse fabric or animal hair and a leather sash. Elisha the Tishbite (2 Kings 1:8) and John the Baptist wore camel's hair and leather belts around their waist (Matt 3:4). Zechariah 13:4 confirms the prophets' attire, "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of their prophetic vision. They will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive." The imagery of the prophets' attire is one of sacrifice and surrender – the frivolities of dress are not important as doing the work of the Lord. There is no evidence in the

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<sup>73</sup> Eric Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) books.google.com

biblical text that shows what a prophetess wore or if they wore the prophets' attire.

- Tassels on garments. The Lord told Moses to speak to the Israelites and tell them throughout generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments with a blue cord on each tassel (Numbers 15:37-41). The tassel (*tzitzit*) is an identity marker to remind the Hebrew people of the commandments of God, a reminder to refrain from sin.
- The widows' garment. It is not clear what type of fabric the garment was made of (wool or linen) yet they were distinctive from ordinary attire. Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Judah heard he was coming to shear his sheep, she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and sat at the entrance (Gen 38:13-19) to Enaim. After having sex with Judah, she took off the disguise and put her widow's garment back on. Rizpah, Saul's concubine, took sackcloth for herself to mourn the death of her sons (2 Sam 21:10). Tearing or renting the clothes in anguish also signified mourning clothes.

#### *Ecclesiastical Apparel –*

After the Hebrew people were delivered out of Egypt and God gave the commands to Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments. God also gave Moses instructions for the design of worship including the detailed description for the garments to be worn by the priests Aaron and his sons, garments that would set them apart as priests from the rest of the people (Gen 28). These garments were sacred and consecrated – the breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. In addition, the garments had to be made with gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen (vs 4-5). God indicated specific details for each item, endowed skilled workers to create them and

indicated what each item represented. Undergarments of linen (loincloths) were also made so the sacred garments would not touch their genitalia (cf. Exodus 39, Lev 16:1-5).

When the priests put on the sacred vestments, they distinguished themselves from ordinary people, and demonstrated the personification of the divine within – they represented the people before God. The sacred character of the priestly garment implied that the priest, when dressed in them, signified that he was unified with its sacredness, which is typified by its glory and beauty (Ex 28:2).<sup>74</sup> They were to wash their bodies before putting on the sacred garments and after ministering in the sanctuary and putting their regular clothes back on (Lev 16:23). God desires that those who minister to distinguish themselves from others. Peter tells us that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (I Pet 2:4-10) – indicating a distinction, an outward expression for followers of Christ to demonstrate to the dark world the light of Truth. As previously mentioned, once regenerated on the inside, the presentation of the outward appearance is instinctive.

#### *Clothes as a Sign of Protest, Grief or Despair –*

Clothing is also represented in the Bible as forms of protests or grief by donning sackcloth and ashes or the tearing of clothes. We first see tearing of the clothes by Reuben in Genesis 37:29 when he discovered that Joseph was no longer in the pit he and his brothers had put him in. Jacob also tore his clothes when he was presented with Joseph's bloodstained robe and also put on sackcloth to mourn his son. Sackcloth was made from a coarse fiber or black animal skin, very uncomfortable to the skin; therefore, as a sign of grief, the garment symbolized intentional discomfort. Jacob refused to be comforted even after his children attempted to comfort him saying, "I will continue to

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<sup>74</sup> Kim, "The Significance of Clothing," 32.

mourn until I join my son in the grave” (v 35). Today, black is still worn as a symbol of mourning.

Tamar, daughter of King David, tore her ornate robe, a garment of honor worn by the virgin daughters of kings (2 Samuel 13: 18-19) after being raped by her brother Amnon. She additionally placed ashes on her head. Mordecai tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went wailing through the city after learning of the plot by Haman to annihilate the Jews (Esther 4:1).

*Clothes with Spiritual Meaning –*

- Jesus’ seamless tunic (John 19:23-24). This seamless coat of the high priest was the focus of Jewish theological interpretation. The fact that Jesus wore an inner tunic that was seamless indicates Jesus was high priest and king at the time of his death.<sup>75</sup> Before his crucifixion, the guards cast lots to see who would receive it, consequently, this inner garment could not be divided. John wrote that when the soldiers looked at the seamless tunic and noticed its beauty and rarity, they said to each other, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be” (John 19:24a). Symbolically, the seamless tunic can be representative of Christ and the church – his followers could not be divided as mentioned by Jesus in prayer (John 17:20-23) “I pray also … that all of them may be one, Father as you and in me and I am in you.”
- Stripping away of social markers (Paul) – Paul instructs the reader in the letters he addressed to the churches at Colossae and Galatia to strip off or take off the old way of life and to put on Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave or free, no male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus,”

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<sup>75</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982 ), 254. Books.google.com

Galatians 3:26-28). In other words, once Christ is put on, there is no longer a need to look at the heritage, gender, or social status of a person because “wearing Christ” is all that needs to be seen. Connell affirms this quality shared by Colossians and Galatians is the erasure of social distinctions which would have represented their cohesive society and visually manifest by similar clothing after baptism.<sup>76</sup> I wrestled with this text from a cultural standpoint because in the Baptist tradition many have negated their African heritage or ethnic culture since being in Christ is all that matters. Yet Jesus never stopped being Jewish. When we put on Christ, we are putting on the character and virtues that Christ embodied in order to reflect God in the earth, a Christ-like personality. Paul was indicating nevertheless, that as children of God baptized into Christ, we are now one in Christ. According to Kim, the clothing-with-the-new-man metaphor in Colossians 3 signifies the believer's baptismal identification with his innermost being, continuously renewed after the image of God.<sup>77</sup> We are clothed in Christ so others can see we are children of God through our actions, deeds and speech – our lifestyles change but our heritage or ethnicity does not.

- Clothes with (healing) power. We particularly see evidence of this with the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed of her issue of blood after twelve years (cf. Luke 8:43-48; Mark 5:30; Matt 9:20-22). We also see in the book of Acts (19:12) that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that touched him were

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<sup>76</sup> Connell, “Clothing the Body,” 137.

<sup>77</sup> Kim, “Significance of Clothing,” 192.

taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and evil spirits left them. The prophet's mantle also possessed power (2 Kings 2). Before the prophet Elijah was to be taken up to heaven, he took off his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it (the Jordan River) and it separated enabling Elijah and Elisha to cross. Elisha inherited the mantle of Elijah and the company of prophets nearby remarked, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha."

- The eschatological garments – white robes. The book of Revelation uses clothing imagery to show John the brilliance of the heavenly/spiritual realm. In John's vision of Christ he sees Christ wearing a long robe to his feet with a golden sash around his chest (Rev 1:13). In chapter four (4:4), John sees the twenty-four elders before the throne of God dressed in white with crowns of gold. Chapter 19:11- 16 reveals the heavenly warrior who is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following on white horses dressed in fine linen, white and clean. In the end, the Lord declares he is coming soon and blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates to the city (22:12-14). The theological implication is that those whose lives have been transformed by Christ, those who have washed their robes – who made the exchange of the old for the new life, have a right to the tree of life. Christ is returning for his bride (the church) and wants the bride to be without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27). This is a laundering process, a process fulfilled through divine intervention.

In addition, Paul talks about the clothes at the apocalypse – the helmet, sword and breastplate that have their imperatives in end times, reflective of a

theological precedent for warfare as mentioned above. Furthermore, in Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God in order that we can stand against the devil's schemes in these present times. Stand with the belt of truth around your waist, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

Even though the clothing items are metaphors, in modern times, they still represent the clothing of a soldier. The implication is putting on this armature as a warrior in Christ is what Christians need in order to fight evil and thwart the attacks of the enemy.

*Implications of Fabric as Clothing for Christians –*

Clothing plays a significant role for Christians that is based upon the biblical text, notwithstanding the debates on modesty and immodesty depending on the denomination. Yet, clothing that is worn in the twenty-first century pales in comparison to the clothes that will be worn in the end by those who follow Christ, the eschatology-vestment.

Based on historical/biblical research, woolens and linens were the primary fabrics used for clothing dependent on the climate, or social occasion. In addition, we understand that the rich dressed differently than the poor, the priests dressed differently than the ordinary people and the kings, and the kings and their families dressed differently from all the rest in royal apparel – confirming that clothes are identity markers. Clothes are still utilized as identity markers in postmodernity and have served purposes beyond basic needs and protection; clothes have also been a source of delight. At Berean, clothes and colors are used for symbolic reasons such as white robes for baptism symbolizing new life, black clothes worn by the church leadership for serving Communion, robes for

clergy and funerals. Members of some religious orders wear simple garments that bear witness to their vocation. For example, the Amish dress simply out of a commitment to direct their attention toward God and one another rather than fashion.<sup>78</sup> The Church of God in Christ on the other hand, may dress extravagantly as their attention reflects the benevolence of God. I agree with Stephanie Paulsell on the adorning of ourselves particularly as it pertains to dressing for church. She asserts, how and with what we adorn ourselves can help shape our identity and heighten our experience of worshipping God.<sup>79</sup> As previously mentioned, regeneration is a major contributor to the transformative way we present ourselves for worship. More importantly, however, is to resist the tendency to idolize the clothes and miss the worship experience. Paulsell suggests that families can resist consumerism and what the fashion industry dictates, and devise creative ways of dressing for church, particularly for the youth. Creative adornment can range from jewelry and accessories made by family or friends to a favorite garment. She posits the outcomes as follows:

Intentional, shared attention to adornment allows children to develop their own sense of what is beautiful and pleasing. By helping children use their own developing aesthetic sense and sense of self to worship God, we encourage children to see their own uniqueness, and not some imposed notion of beauty, as intrinsic to what it means to be made in God's image.<sup>80</sup>

Yet Christians are not the only ones faced with clothing doctrines in their faith traditions. The Qur'an and the Torah also provide reference to dress for women. I interviewed a female Rabbi and an Islamic female relative whose teenage daughter is a fashion designer. I was surprised to learn that Islamic fashion has its own fashion week.

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<sup>78</sup> Stephanie Paulsell, "Honoring the Body" *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* Dorothy C. Bass ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 20-21.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

In my interview (recorded via telephone Nov 19, 2014) with Keturah, I wanted to know how theologies of clothing impacted Muslim teenage girls and if they were challenged by or rebelled against their attire for Western culture. Much of the hadith and religious practice comes from the narrations of the prophet's wife Aisha. (The Hadith is the recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.) She indicated when girls enter puberty, they wear their heads covered. Regarding dress for girls, we see one instance as written:

Narrated Aisha (the Prophet's wife): Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) turned his attention from her. He said: "O Asma, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this," and he pointed to his face and hands.<sup>81</sup>

She also shared these texts from The Qur'an which gives general commands which may help in understanding how to interpret dress codes and other rules in modern times. "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (Surah 33:59); and, "O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best. Such are among the signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition (Surah 7:26). For Muslim women, modesty is multifaceted. What is considered modest in one place is not in another. The most conservative is clear cut, the Muhammedan scriptures: the full body and face covering offered by the *niqab* – is too modest for many. The focus on what to cover also differs. In Morocco, hiding body contours is appropriate, not the hair. In Malaysia, Indonesian girls wear jeans and t-shirts but cover the hair with

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<sup>81</sup> Abu Dawud (d. 888), Book 32, No 4092. There are six canonical hadith collections believed to contain the most authentic reports of the Prophet's sayings and doings, the most famed being those by Bukhari (d. 870), by Muslim (d. 875), by Abu Dawud (d. 888) and the Musnad by Ibn Hanbal (d. 855).

*tudong*, a headscarf to express Islamic identity.<sup>82</sup> In addition, modesty is a personal quality that does not need to be reinforced by any specific type or item of dress. I asked Keturah the question; in your opinion does God care about clothing? Her reply:

In my opinion, to the degree that you can be the most veiled creature on the earth and your heart is ugly to that degree no. On the flip side, God knows his creatures, knows our weaknesses, faults and strengths; I believe there is an injunction for me to do a certain thing from what I believe is the Creator of all things; who am I to think that I know better to do something differently. And I think that that's the very essence of Islam and really all faith. You're asked to have faith in something bigger than you. So, in the big scheme of things no. I think God left instructions to live the best life in the environment he created - in this case, yes. He cares enough about us to give us some instructions.

Keturah's daughters have not challenged nor rebelled against the dictates of what Qur'an says about dress for women, it is a part of their faith – submission to Allah as written in the Qur'an (33:36) "And it is not for a believer man or believer woman to have any choice in their affair when Allah and His Messenger decided a matter; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, indeed he has strayed a manifest straying." This is what she refers to in the interview, God cares enough about us to give us some instructions, in other words, follow them.

There are ongoing debates about the veil. Some say that it is a mark of fundamentalism, indicating strong convictions regarding gender relations or religious devotion and implying unveiled Muslim women lack these qualities. Then there are those who suggest the veil symbolizes traditionalism, women who veil do so to gain societal esteem in patriarchal communities or to avoid harassment by men.<sup>83</sup> A major implication

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<sup>82</sup> Pepin van Roojen, *Traditional and Modern Dress in the Muslim World* (Amsterdam: Pepin Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>83</sup> For more on the veil see Bahar Davary, "Miss Elsa and the Veil: Honor, Shame, and Identity Negotiations" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25, no. 2 (2009), 47-66; Pat Mule and Diane Barthel, "The Return to the Veil: Individual Autonomy vs. Social Esteem" *Sociological Forum* 7, no. 2 (June 1992), 323-32; Jakobus (Koos) M. Vorster, "Banning the Burka? An Ethical Appraisal" *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011), 86-103; and Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 83.

however from my interview is that dressing modestly means nothing to God if a person's heart is void of love, justice and mercy; and submission to God warrants following the instructions God puts forth in the Word.

In my interview with the female Rabbi (recorded via telephone Nov 20, 2014) regarding dress in Judaism for women, she referred to a text in the Torah that says, women and men are not supposed to dress like one another (Deuteronomy 22:5), "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this." Another law has to do with a restriction on wearing clothing that has mixed fabrics. Clothing standards varies within the different groups of Judaism: orthodox (ultra-orthodox), Hassidic, conservative, reformed – some will only wear clothes made according to the law in Torah (not mixing wool/yarn with linen). The Rabbi asserted, clothing has to do with not putting together two different species of animals as written in Torah (Lev 19:19). This extrapolated to the clothing not having these two types of materials and is related to the idea of keeping things separate. This is corroborated by Eric Silverman in his book, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*.<sup>84</sup> With respect to women's clothing however, she said nothing was in the Torah. I asked the question, where then did Jewish women get their style of long sleeves and skirts from? Her response was:

There are the 613 Jewish laws and 613 rabbinic interpretations of the 613 laws on how to live. It has to do with modesty and it is culturally driven by men and not women. The covering of the elbows, girls wear long sleeve shirts and long skirts, that's modesty. Regarding women's hair, hair drives men crazy she said. It is sexual; and if a man sees a woman's hair he'll be overcome with lust. It plays out ... until a girl is married, her hair does not have to be covered; once she is married she has to cover her hair because only her husband should see it. In the modern period, the last 300-400 years, when women get married, they wear a kerchief. If they are poor women, they wear a kerchief; if a woman of means they wear

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<sup>84</sup> Silverman, *A Cultural History*, 17-19.

human hair wigs only. Younger women tend not to wear wigs; they wear knitted caps over their heads.

According to Silverman, hair in the Hebrew Bible doubled for clothing and national identity and women's hair received a great deal of attention in the biblical text. The disheveling of a woman's hair was tantamount to a forced undressing and depicted the power men exalter over women and their bodies.<sup>85</sup> We find this example in the biblical text in Numbers 5:11-31 where women were brought before the priest if they were suspect of infidelity.

I also asked the Rabbi if she noticed any shifts among Jewish teenage girls protesting their style of dress, and she replied:

These girls don't protest in these communities. They marry them off very young ... they stay in their own community, they don't watch TV, they don't have access to a broader world, of broader ideas, they attend their own religious schools they don't go to public schools... so in order to rebel you have to have some concept that things are different for other people. Like the Mennonites, they have these strict rules, there is no rebellion. If you do, you are out of the community.

How people dress, especially girls is a family matter and not driven by any type of religious or spiritual commandment. One thing that has changed, she further notes, since Judaism started to ordain women (1972), women rabbis have started to take on the custom of wearing skull caps (*kippahs*) and prayer shawls which traditionally were worn by men. They have encouraged young girls having bat mitzvah to wear *kippahs* and prayer shawls to signify she has become a female Jewish adult. In addition, the prayer shawls come in different colors and are more feminine looking while keeping the fringes on the corners (*tzitzit*) tied in a certain way (they represent the 613 commandments in the Torah). This rite of passage now makes the girls responsible for taking on the commandments and having their own relationship with God.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

The implications from both interviews reveal an across the board standard (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) that modesty in dress is connected to one's relationship with God and worship, societal norms and lifestyles. While there is adherence to their faith doctrine in Islam and Judaism regarding modesty, Protestantism has become more liberal wherein women and girls wear pants to church. When I was growing up that was evil and unacceptable according to the Bible and was part of the Baptist church culture. Up until about sixteen years ago, women did not wear pants to worship at Berean. In lieu of this, Protestants focus contextually on the transformative aspects of being a new creature, a new person in Christ. Again, I emphasize that regeneration plays a major role in the transformation process.

Over the past several decades, the focus has centered on the external – emphasis on the outer garment, what we step into when we get dressed in the morning or what we put on to go out in the evening. We spend billions of dollars a year on looking good on the outside. The focus of this paper however, is to talk about the Divine Designer who makes clothes that dress us on the inside with garments that never go out of style, with garments that have power, with garments that reflect the Creator in a tangible way, far beyond what any material garment can.

### **Spiritual Virtues as Clothing**

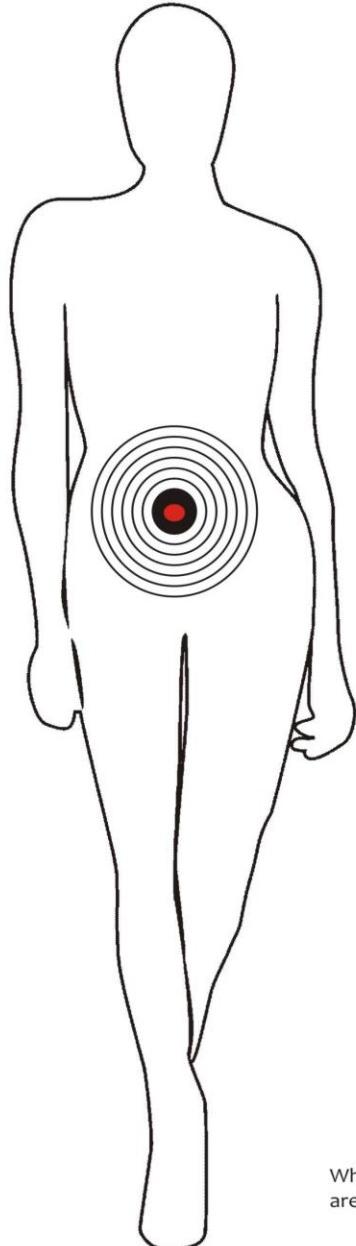
“I don’t like my body, I hate my freckles, I wish my feet would stop growing and I’m insecure.” These were the remarks from one of the teen girls during teen Bible study. The assignment was to draw their body image and write inside the form what was in their minds, their heart and the qualities that make them unique. This particular girl wrote INSECURE big across her chest. My response to her was, “When I look at you I don’t see insecure.” She said, “I know, I cover it up.” That comment created an “ah ha!”

moment for me, epic in that it made me clearly see the propensity we have to wear inner garments, the intangible clothes that cover our spirit man/woman, our true identity in God. Many people hide behind those coverings afraid to show their beauty and greatness for whatever the prevailing obstacle or reason may be.

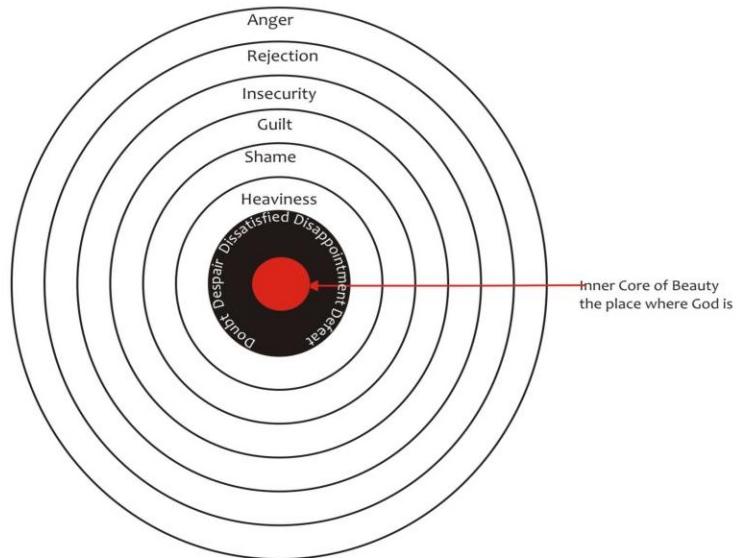
Fashion over the centuries has shown us how the external, the tangible clothes create signifiers of identity markers - status, class, or cultural/tribal heritage. However, it is the inner garments, the intangible clothes unseen yet reflected in how African American teenage girls see themselves and how they make their clothing choices. The inner garments are the ones that mirror who or what is spiritually behind the design: the negative clothes representing the dark side of the soul (evil) or the positive clothes representing the virtues and character of God. The intangible garments are not a new phenomenon; they are dispersed throughout the First and Second Testaments from Genesis to Revelation described as garments of grace, salvation, praise, splendor and righteousness to garments of heaviness, shame, and mourning. However, what made the scenario at Bible study connect with theological inference was witnessing the dynamics that intangible clothes have on teenage girls. They were uncomfortable and angry, yet transparent and honest after they talked about the contents inside their bodies, and named the feelings, qualities and values that they liked and disliked about themselves.

God revealed the intangible garments to me in such an emphatic way that I created an illustration for graphic imagery in order for youth and youth leaders to see what the inner garments can look like. (See Figure 1)

## The Intangible Clothes



## Clothed in the garments of sin



## Clothed in the Virtues of Christ



Inner Core of Beauty  
the place where God is

When we are clothed with the virtues of God, all the other layers that covered are true essence are peeled away until we get to the core of our being in *imago dei*.

Figure 1. This image shows the two types of intangible clothes. When clothed in the garments of sin and oppression; and when clothed in the virtues of God, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, gentleness, patience and love.

The image in Figure 1 depicts the inner core of our being, the space where the human spirit and the Spirit of God meet, the place of wombness where conception and

delivery to the revelation of God's presence and character are birthed. Mary's womb was chosen to give birth to the physical Christ (cf. Matthew 1, Luke 1). Asian theologian C.S. Song asserts that Mary's theology of the womb must be the foundation of all theology – politics, history, cultures – that it is a theology of God's saving love for humanity created in God's image.<sup>86</sup> Humanity will never be able to replicate the physical birth of Christ, however, the privilege to give birth to the spiritual Christ because the seed, the Word of God planted in our hearts by the Spirit of God is given space to develop and grow.

Nicholas Constas, former Harvard Divinity professor, affirms Mary's womb as a creative space in his article on Proclus of Constantinople who intuitively imagines the womb of the Virgin Mary as a textile workshop:

The Virgin's womb is depicted as a workshop containing the textile-loom on which the flesh of God is knit, woven together, and, upon its completion, wrapped around the bodiless divinity, giving it form and texture.<sup>87</sup>

Humanity experiences the same weaving process because we are spiritual beings having the intricate parts of our bodies knit together in the womb. As an African American woman using a womanist theoretical framework, my hermeneutical interpretation implies that the wombs of Black women have been workshops for centuries, constructing a type of textured theology of clothing. Wombs as workshops intricately weaving civilizations, wombs weaving the lives of children who would later be snatched and used for capital gain during chattel slavery, and wombs that continue to birth spiritual gifts from God. A valid question can be asked today, can teenage girls be inspired to value their wombs beyond a place to bear children and embrace it as a workshop for creating a relationship with God or constructing theologies of clothing reflecting the Divine Designer? How can

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<sup>86</sup> C. S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005) 119.

<sup>87</sup> Constas, "Weaving the Body," 169-194.

youth leaders instruct teenage girls ontologically for them to see the importance of their inner essence?

The image also depicts the way in which we miss out on experiencing the fullness of God in us. Life experiences, circumstances, or relationships have propelled us to cover up our true and beautiful selves with layers of inner covering that is not reflective of the Christ, the truth and the light in us. According to the Psalmist, there is no place we can really hide from God in Psalm 139: 7, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” The Psalmist understood that no matter the circumstance, they could not escape God’s presence; not in the heavens or under the sea.

This message is promising, particularly for youth. The Psalmist also understood the relationship with God and the womb; they continue in verse 13, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Again, we see the imagery of the weaver’s loom at work in the womb. This passage of scripture is generally used as an esteem building message, an encouraging reminder for those who live with low self-esteem or dealing with identity crisis. The hand of God is at work at the loom transforming the very fibers of our being, unravelling the threads, the layers of intangible clothes that are oppressive and deceptive. The youth at teen Bible Study that evening got a glimpse of their invisible attire and they ended the evening in tears and in a solemn mood. In their vernacular, they were “tight” meaning very upset.

In the Hans Christian Andersen tale, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, there was an emperor who loved new clothes. One day two swindlers posing as weavers came to town and announced their ability to weave clothes with fabrics and colors that were special because the clothes would come out invisible. Those who were unfit for their positions,

or stupid, would not be able to see the clothes – a major selling point for the emperor. He wanted those invisible clothes for himself and paid them a lot of money so he could find out who the unfit men were in his cabinet. As the days progressed, the king sent men in to check on the weaver's work, but no one literally saw any fabric on the looms as the swindlers wove away on the emperor's garments, and for fear of being found unfit or stupid, they went along with the program. In the end, the swindling weavers had the emperor strip naked and dressed him in his invisible clothes. Everyone went along with the gesture. When the emperor proudly processed through the kingdom, only a child was honest enough to say that the emperor was actually naked.

I shared the story because it gives a vivid account of how spiritual weavers are always at work creating invisible or intangible clothes for us to wear – either they are weavers of darkness or weavers of light. It is important that youth leaders and ministers be aware of the sources that are providing clothing for the inward parts of our youth. Furthermore, youth will need assistance in learning to decipher the difference since these two forces are constantly at work within our spirit. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:22-24 to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

### ***Garment of Shame or ‘Sin Wear’***

I continue this discourse of constructing a biblical theology of intangible clothing in the Genesis story with Adam and Eve making coverings from fig leaves to hide their nakedness. The woman conversed with a serpent that convinced her that she will not die if she ate the fruit from the tree God told them not to eat from. She ate the fruit and afterwards offered the fruit to her husband then their eyes were opened and they saw their

nakedness and were ashamed and they sewed fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves (v. 7). The fig leaves represent a garment of shame or “sin-wear” designed by the man and the woman. The garment of shame is indicative of covering a spiritual malfunction with visible attire. Reflecting on this thought brought to mind how damaging this garment can be, and how some people are unaware of the spiritual ramifications. My study on the garment of shame produced a real story from a woman I will call Maylene:

I was explaining my work about the intangible clothes and the role they play in the lives of teenage girls with a woman, who maintains our office one day in January, 2015. She then began to share her story about growing up and how her father always teased her about the size of her breasts. He called her scrambled eggs, she said, because they were flat. Her recollection of significance was the pornography magazines her father kept (discovered while playing hide and seek). She noticed the women did not look like her nor was she endowed with breasts like those women in the magazines. Maylene was able to relate to the garment of shame in her own way. She said the teasing by her father made her wear layers of sweaters – “Even if it was 90 degrees outside I covered myself up because I was so ashamed.”

For Maylene, her sweaters were the fig leaves covering her shame, a shame rooted in the comparison and humiliation she experienced from her father who compared her to the naked white women portrayed in the pornographic magazines. She informed me that it took her years to be delivered from this shame and to accept her self-worth. Maylene also indicated this work needs to be done with women.

We are told to throw off our filthy garments in exchange for garments of transformation that God provides. Zechariah was shown a vision of this clothing exchange in a vision. Joshua was standing before the angel of the Lord with Satan at his right side to accuse him: (Zech 3):

The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.” Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.”

Garments of shame can also consist of poverty, hopelessness, sickness, failure, abuse (physically and emotionally), despair or suffering. They are garments that cover the inner beauty. For a teenage girl, these garments are heavy, burdensome and can incite destructive behavior. The Lord says, “Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth....” (Is 54:4) Although speaking to Israel’s widowhood, this text is comforting for youth leaders to share and apply with girls in that God can and will remove the garments of shame and replace them with garments of salvation, joy, hope and righteousness.

Historically, and physically, shame has been attached to items of clothing created specifically to dehumanize the individual. Throughout the ages clothes have been used as markers of shame. According to the editor’s article in *Vestoj, The Journal of Sartorial Matters*:

In seventeenth century England and Scotland, the branks, an iron muzzle with a bridle, often spiked and pressing down on the wearer’s tongue, was a common device used for punishment and public humiliation. The dunce cap in the 1840 novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens, and a decade later Nathaniel Hawthorne gives a moving account of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, a woman in seventeenth century Puritan Boston, forced to wear the symbol of her crime stitched on her chest. We have seen the yellow Star of David and the pink triangles come and go, as well as the striped prison uniform.<sup>88</sup>

I was previously unaware of the pink triangle and the yellow Star of David. However, in researching the origins of these two symbols, I later learned they were badges of shame that Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. The pink triangle was worn by homosexual males in the camp to make their lifestyle known.<sup>89</sup> Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation – both individually and universally and when linked to

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<sup>88</sup> “Issue Three: On Fashion and Shame” *Vestoj, The Journal of Sartorial Matters*, <http://vestoj.com/issues/issue-three-on-fashion-and-shame/> (accessed March 17, 2015).

<sup>89</sup> Ken Cage, *Gayle: The Language of Kinks and Queens: a History and Dictionary of Gay Language in South Africa* (Houghton: Jacana Media, 2003), 46. Books.google.com.

clothing and accessories – visibly and invisibly. For Africans brought to America, chained and put on display, their nakedness were garments of shame. For many African Americans skin color is a garment of shame.

### **Let God Dress You**

In my sermon, “Dressed from the Inside Out,” I highlighted the clothing metaphors Paul used in Colossians 3:12-14, and I aligned each of the virtues with an item of clothing. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all of these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.” But before we can put on these new clothes, we must first take off the old ones mentioned in verses 5-9. Take off fornication, uncleanness, evil desires, covetous which is idolatry, anger, discord, filthy language and lying, otherwise it is like putting new wine in old wineskins. From the research I conducted, it is unfashionable to be dressed by God —to put on the new self for some of the teenage girls in Berean. Many of the girls do not see the need to make changes in their lifestyles, attitudes or vocabulary. Youth leaders are confronted with a challenge in making it clear to teenage girls what being dressed in the virtues of God entails for their daily lives. Paul writes when we commit our lives to Christ and establish Christ as Savior, there is a noticeable change in our lifestyles. Old behaviors, attitudes and ideologies we once had have to shift, have to be removed in order for the image of God/Christ to be experienced and seen by others.

Let us look at the wardrobe that Paul encourages believers to put on in Colossians. First, he says to put on compassion or tender mercies. Compassion is housed in our hearts. We show compassion because our hearts are filled with love and mercy.

Therefore, compassion is like a shirt, because it is worn close to the heart. Paul instructs the Colossian church to put on compassion, in order to demonstrate that conversion through baptism is something to be seen. The same principle applies to the church today. We cannot be like the people in the church Jesus described in the parable about the Good Samaritan who walked past the injured man to avoid contact with him. The man had been beaten and stripped of his clothes. Perhaps he was unrecognizable without his clothes since clothing during that time was a marker of one's identity and nationality.<sup>90</sup> Yet, when the Samaritan man passed by he had pity on the man and disregarded identity, culture, nationality or race. He showed compassion. Jesus used this parable to explain to an expert in the law who his neighbor was. Compassion is showed off as a shirt (perhaps that is where the phrase ‘giving the shirt off your back’ came from). Compassion is demonstrated without barriers.

Secondly, he declares to put on kindness – it is akin to putting on a pair of shoes because wherever our feet tread, good deeds abound. Thinking about kindness, shoes come to mind because humanity is to walk in and with kindness. Kindness travels, kindness moves, kindness goes wherever we go. “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation...” (Isaiah 52:7). Howard Thurman, the great mystic and theologian, talks about a hindrance to showing kindness – fear. Fear is like a pair of cement shoes wearing you down and causing you to sink into despair and immobility. He posits, “Fear is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed,

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<sup>90</sup> Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz and Frank M. Yamada, “Culture and Identity” *The Peoples Companion to the Bible*, Curtis Paul DeYoung, Wilda C. Gafney, Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, George Tinker, and Frank M. Yamada, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 3-9.

and the disinherited.”<sup>91</sup> How can one show kindness in the midst of fear? Kindness, like shoes wears out if worn abusively and without care. When we observe a pair of shoes there is a sole, eyes and a tongue. Every now and then, shoes need to go to the repair shop to be refreshed with new soles or heels. So it is with kindness, we must demonstrate healthy and well-kept kindness since our feet are to be shod with the gospel of truth. We must be mindful of our actions and recognize when our tongues are flapping away and need to be tucked in, when soles have holes, and heels are run down. Paul encourages us not to be weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we faint not (Gal 6:9).

Humility is likened to a hat that covers the head keeping pride and a haughty spirit from dominating your thoughts. Proverbs 16:18 says that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. God does not want humanity living with the kind of prideful, haughty spirit that caused Lucifer to be cast out of heaven. Paul exhorts us to have the mind of Christ as he declared to the church in Corinth (I Cor. 2:16b). Having a spirit of humility imitates Christ’s humility. Paul writes to the Philippian church, do nothing out of vain conceit, rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (Phil 2:3-4).

Gentleness is likened to a pair of pants or a skirt because sometimes people can be a little foul below the belt. These garments block the low blows and keep under wraps those things that can yield a stench unbecoming to our character. We put on gentleness as a means of loving and caring about ourselves and our neighbors. There is something about the bottom half of our bodies that signify the need to be covered especially in public. It seems, however that there is a level of vulnerability in that area; one that is

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<sup>91</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 36.

tender and needs to be protected because it is where our reproductive organs are located. When we respect and honor our seed and the seed of others with gentleness, we will reap a harvest of truth and love in the likeness of Christ. Paul says to put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature (Col 3:5).

Patience or longsuffering is likened to a blazer, it is the extra covering of the heart area paired up with compassion and tender mercies. The jacket adds polish to the outfit, creating a suit or a coordinated outfit. It ensures extra shielding of the heart area. Paul describes patience as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Patience is one of the virtues that we learn; we are not born with patience. From the time that we are infants, crying for a nursing bottle, we are told to be patient and wait, mommy is coming soon with it. However, it is difficult to practice patience in a society where technology affords rapid speed results. Not only that, the propensity to achieve results quickly has resulted in a mindset that is less sensitive to our humanness. That is why in coordinating pants or skirts with patience (blazer), I see them as something to cover our insensitivity, our hastiness, and our premature utterings that cause pain. Paul reassures us to be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). It is essential that we put on patience with intentionality because otherwise our impatience will ooze pleasantries that are unpleasant, hurtful and even fatal.

Then he spends some time in this area – bear with one another and forgive one another. Why elaborate on this virtue? What is it about forgiveness that requires such focus? I believe it is because forgiveness is the virtue that we give away, that we release as a gift from our hands. We do not give away patience, gentleness or compassion. Forgiveness is the best accessory anyone can have; it is like an expensive pair of kid gloves because forgiveness is costly. An individual does not forgive someone merely for

their own sake; it is done so that the individual can be free emotionally and spiritually. Forgiveness is something we have to learn. Jesus' disciples asked him how many times do we have to forgive someone seven times? And the Lord said seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22 AMP) – in other words, however many times it takes. Women and girls have endured horrific trials and tribulations, personally or ones that have been passed down through generations. Even throughout biblical stories, we see incidences where women and girls were ravaged and mistreated, rebuked, scorned, saw their children killed, tested and tried in the fire. African American women and girls have come through chattel slavery, seen their families ripped apart and sold, nursed other women's children and still had to fight to be considered human in America. They go through betrayal, hurt, abuse and rejection in relationships. There is just cause to harbor resentment and bitterness against the offenders, but God wants us to handle things differently. Forgiveness is the virtue God wants us to wear in a place that is not hard for us to take off, that will not bear our nakedness or reveal any problem areas.

Finally, Paul says above all of the virtues put on love which is the bond of perfection. *The Message* calls it the “all-purpose garment.” It is the overcoat. Love completes the outfit; love completes the look. You are fully clothed on the inside in the character of Christ. You are wearing designer clothes with power; clothes that are invisible yet permeate the surface in the natural. Jesus demonstrated how we ought to love ourselves, our neighbors and our enemies. The gospels are filled with stories concerning Jesus' encounters with the others to whom he showed mercy, patience, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness and love. It will be a challenge to propose to most teenaged girls who experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse, bullying, low self-esteem, depression, weight issues, and a lack of love, that loving themselves and their

enemy is something they need to embrace. Yet Jesus holds the key or the needle for that matter for each situation. He is the Master Tailor who holds the threads of our lives in his hands, who unstitches our worn out and ragged seams and re-stitches them with the perfected touch in order to get us in the right form of righteousness.

I pointed out to the congregation that they are fully dressed on the inside with the character of Christ when this wardrobe is worn. The Lord says by this, people will know that you are my disciple. Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27, “For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so, you also outwardly appear righteous to men; but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” Spiritual clothes reflect one’s character and are visible on the outside in forms demonstrated by the way one treats others and themselves. When the Lord dresses you, you are never out of style, you are never behind in fashion; never have to wait for a sale – the spiritual clothing are always available, free to all, and ready to wear. Being dressed from the inside out impacts the choices made for the outerwear.

Other spiritual garments that God clothes humanity in are the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isaiah 61:3), being clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49), clothed with Christ in order to deny gratifying the desires of the flesh (Romans 13:14), and being clothed with the whole armor of God, dressed in spiritual war clothes to ward off the fiery darts of the enemy (Eph 6:11-18). These war clothes are important for spiritual strength:

When going through a tough time, Fendi cannot fight off the fiery darts of the enemy – a breastplate of righteousness is needed. When the mind is under siege with a barrage of suicidal and depressive thoughts and Satan wants you to doubt God, you cannot cover the head with a hat by Kangol and fight back, a helmet of salvation is needed. Satan fights with lies and sometimes his lies sound like truth – somebody just told you that you are worthless, good for nothing, not wanted any

longer – a Juicy Couture belt will not help you out; you need the belt of truth. You are going through rejection and heartache, the pink suit in Lord & Taylor will not stop the pain, you need to stop by the Divine Boutique and pick up the shield of faith and wear it like a corset to fight off the insults, setbacks and temptations.<sup>92</sup>

I believe the theology of clothing is on the cutting edge. Paul used the metaphor of clothing to demonstrate what the new life in Christ would be like; the taking off the old with its nature and practices and putting on the new nature received through baptism. From my own experience of regeneration, the new life in Christ, my wardrobe changed. It is through the work of Holy Spirit that the reality in fashion on the runway of life will be judged by the inner wear more than the outerwear.

### **What the Early Church Fathers Say about Women's Dress**

The early church fathers were vocal about their position on clothing and the Christian faith particularly as it pertains to women. Harsh is an appropriate word to describe how Tertullian references his discourse on the subject. In his work *On the Apparel of Women*, Tertullian expounds on the subject of modesty in female dress – what dress and personal appearance is lawful and unlawful and the bearing upon salvation that elaborate dressing of the hair and adornment have. Since we are set apart and are the temple of the Holy Spirit, Tertullian asserts that modesty is the custodian and priestess of that temple.<sup>93</sup> In other words, Tertullian believed that women should not put anything on themselves (clothes or makeup) that will be a stumbling block to their salvation, or a stumbling block to their neighbor. He continues, “Those who rub their skin with medicinals, stain their cheeks with rouge, make their eyes prominent with metallic

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<sup>92</sup> Gail Davis, “Dressed from the Inside Out” sermon delivered March, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> *Tertullian: On the Apparel of Women* (Public Domain, written circa 225 A.D.: A Codex Spiritualis Publication, 2012). Chap 1.

minerals sin against God.”<sup>94</sup> Tertullian was firm in his belief that these artificial means of adorning oneself was of the adversary, the devil, who transfigured man’s spirit. Other major concepts that I extrapolated from Tertullian’s work are:

- Women do violence to God when they try to add to what God created. He states, “Let a holy woman if naturally beautiful give none so great occasion for carnal appetite, she ought not set off her beauty, but obscure it;” and, “Whatever is born is the work of God. Whatever then is plastered on, that is the devil’s work.”<sup>95</sup> Natural beauty is God-given, embellishments and adornments are artificial for Tertullian, and these embellishments interfered with salvation.
- Christian women’s apparel should look different than the Gentiles or women of the world. Gentile women, in his eyes, have no modesty. “For if any modesty can be believed to exist in Gentiles, it must be imperfect, undisciplined, and perverse.” I agree with Tertullian that Christian women should look different however, not because of legalism or dogma but because of their relationship with the Triune God. Regeneration has a transformative component that is almost instinctive, and the desire is to please God.
- The issue of women dressing their hair elaborately is a form of slavery and interferes with salvation. Tertullian chastises women for adorning, piling their heads up with false hair (wigs) because it is done in vain. He declares, “If you feel no shame at the enormity, feel some at the pollution; for fear you may be fitting on a holy and Christian head the filth of someone else’s head, unclean perchance,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. Chap. V.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Chap. I.

guilty perchance and destined to hell.”<sup>96</sup> He says that women should banish from their “free” head all this slavery of ornamentation because God does not wish to look upon their heads in such elaborate condition that is why the veil is needed. I wonder what women would say to this statement who wear weaves today?

Tertullian was not alone in shunning the excess in apparel and dress women lavished themselves in. Chrysostom, Ambrose and Clement warn, “If the Christian matron chooses to adorn herself with elaborate hairdressings, gold, gems and cosmetics, she will have to compete with the other adorned women who would surely outrival her: harlots and prostitutes.”<sup>97</sup> Christianity warranted simple, plain dressing, any embellishing of the body was associated with harlotry, prostitution and sin. What the church fathers did agree upon was that a woman could dress extravagantly for her husband in the home. Clement believed if adornment was necessary, it is the soul that is to be decorated with the ornament of goodness, and the flesh with temperance. He asserts, “So those women who wear gold, occupying themselves in curling at their locks, and engaged in anointing their cheeks, painting their eyes, and dyeing their hair, and practicing the other pernicious arts of luxury, decking the covering of flesh – in truth, imitate the Egyptians in order to attract their infatuated lovers.”<sup>98</sup> Clement also insisted women who were extravagant with their outer body had their souls tainted. If someone removed the veil, the head-dress of these women, they would not find true beauty. He affirms, “I know well, for he will not find the image of God dwelling within, as is meet, but instead of it a fornicator and adulteress

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<sup>96</sup> Tertullian, *Apparel*, chap VII.

<sup>97</sup> Kristi Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue and Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 50.

<sup>98</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.2, The Works of Clement of Alexandria, Alexander Roberts, ed. Arthur Cleveland Coxe ed., Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson trans. (1885) loc 8081. Kindle version.

has occupied the shrine of the soul.”<sup>99</sup> The influence of the early church fathers have penetrated some of the Christian denominations that held a standard of dress for women – Catholics, Pentecostals, the Amish, Mennonites, and Mormons for example. *The Instructor*, according to Clement, permits us to use simple clothing, and of a white colour... Temperance is pure and simple; since purity is a habit which ensures pure conduct.<sup>100</sup> To imply that God cannot or will not dwell in the body of a woman who adorned herself is alarming and for a teenage girl incomprehensible. Nevertheless, I revert to regeneration – Holy Spirit will reveal in the new birth what old habits, wardrobe items and people that have to be removed from the convert’s life. And conviction will bring about transformation according to Galatians 5:17 “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

St. Thomas Aquinas responds to Cyprian’s adornment of women and the question of whether the adornment of women is devoid of mortal sin. For Aquinas, it was a sin for women to wear men’s clothing according to Deut. 22:5, “A woman shall not be clothed with man’s apparel, neither shall a man use woman’s apparel” yet for a woman to dress inordinately or with excessive adornment, it was a mortal sin except in the case when hiding from enemies or a lack of other clothes.<sup>101</sup> Aquinas acknowledges Cyprian’s comments that women should be admonished for interfering with God’s handiwork with regard to embellishing their bodies with makeup and dress. Christian leaders used female ascetics as symbols of piety, it was therefore imperative to carefully monitor and

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<sup>99</sup> Clement 3.2.

<sup>100</sup> Clement 3.11.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Aquinas, (1265-1274) *Summa Theologica*, Fathers of the Dominican Province, trans. (electronically developed by Coyote Canyon Press) 2.169.2.

constrain their dress and physical appearance. Virgins who wore makeup failed to achieve virginity to its fullness and violated their vows.<sup>102</sup> In other words, their virginity was fraudulent on the basis of their outward appearance.

The Bible is referenced as the source the early church fathers used as a means to teach piety and enforce right living through external accoutrements. Ezekiel 16 poignantly demonstrates God's scorn for Jerusalem as an adulterous wife showing her nakedness, being a prostitute, adorning herself with makeup to lure her lovers and using her jewelry to build idols. I see the connection or the association the early church fathers might have used to justify their position. Yet God promised restoration to Jerusalem in spite of her disobedience and waywardness, something humanity does not offer.

Womanists would critically engage with these clothing and hair concepts spoken of by the early church fathers and create a discourse of resistance to the oppressive intersectionalism instituted by the church. Born again Christians on the other hand may agree to an extent because regeneration warrants transformation, “do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” Rom 12:2.

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<sup>102</sup> Upson-Saia, Early Christian Dress, 50-53.

**Research Question 2 (Historical/Cultural): How have theologies of clothing impacted the fashion choices, expectations of, and treatment of females over time?**

This question aligns with the fourth goal which is to embody liberatory theologies and practice that counter oppressive norms for teenage girls. The strategies noted to address this question included document analysis, group discussions with men and women, preaching, workshops and public service announcements. While the goal has not been fully accomplished nor all the strategies employed, I answered two of the questions (1) How have theologies of clothing impacted the fashion choices, expectations of, and treatment of females over time? and (2) How have denominations used these theologies of clothing to norm the culture of dress? Through literature reviews, these theologies of clothing would be associated with Jezebel and the color red – the connotation of prostitution and seduction, modesty appropriated to women, and the “come as you are” ideology because God looks at the heart.

As an African American woman who has loved clothes and fashion from girlhood, as a woman of faith whose hermeneutics resonate from a place of creativity, and as a mother and grandmother having raised girls, I am astounded by the bombardment of societal dictates through media, reality television or music videos that have pushed many of our girls to adverse identity crisis and body/self-image disorder. Like many youth leaders, parents, pastors and teachers, I was concerned over reports of plummeting self-esteem among adolescent girls, particularly African-American and inner city teenage girls. Reports published by women’s organizations such as the New York Women’s Foundation, the Dove Self-Esteem Project/Dove Foundation and Girls Inc. New York City reveal the riveting data and the escalating trends regarding the status of

girls from their sexual activity and health and well-being to education, crime, poverty etc.<sup>103</sup>

I would be remiss were I not to take up issue in this discourse with the fashion industries who for years through media portrayed an image of beauty using clothing and adornment that contributed to body or self-image disorder. The media has promoted thin bodies for years to sell a product. Fashion models weigh between 100 and 110 pounds, five feet seven inches or taller are 23 percent thinner than 75 percent of American women who on average are 143 pounds and five foot four inches or shorter.<sup>104</sup> While there still remains a prevailing issue in the way the fashion models are portrayed as the norm for beauty, there have been advances in media to represent average American women, full size women and dark-skinned women. Academy award winner Lupita Nyong'o told *Glamour* in an interview, “European standards of beauty are something that plagues the entire world -- the idea that darker skin is not beautiful and that light skin is the key to success and love. Africa is no exception.”<sup>105</sup> Burrell conjectures in his book *Brainwashed*, that for generations we’ve been engaged in an effort to regain a sense of “somebodiness” through our material possessions and the way we dress.<sup>106</sup> This is further noted in *Black Style*. The compilation of essays articulate the fact that African Americans or Blacks have had to create their own style from what was given to them since their cultures have been stripped away. African Americans have challenged and complicated

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<sup>103</sup> The reports from the aforementioned organizations’ can be reviewed on websites: [www.girlsincnyc.org/research.html](http://www.girlsincnyc.org/research.html), [www.nywf.org/2013/04/economicsecurityandwellbeingindex/](http://www.nywf.org/2013/04/economicsecurityandwellbeingindex/), <http://www.dove.us/Our-Mission/Girls-Self-Esteem/Our-Research/default.aspx>. (accessed October 15, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Brenda Lane Richardson and Elane Rehr, *101 Ways to Help Your Daughter Love Her Body* (New York: Quill, 2001) xxii.

<sup>105</sup> Lupita Nyong'o interview with *Glamour*. <http://goo.gl/tC3BPz>. (accessed November 30, 2014).

<sup>106</sup> Burrell, *Brainwashed*. 146.

the dichotomies supported by the European American establishment by appropriating white fashion to create a more striking version of their own.<sup>107</sup> Notwithstanding, African American women and girls continue to wrestle with a proper representation of their identity in the media.

Clothing, nevertheless, has played a significant role in the cover up these deficits, dissimilarities and definitions of the European standard of beauty. For example, the reality TV show *Keeping up with the Kardashian's*,<sup>108</sup> has served as a major contributor in presenting the latest fashion, shoes, handbags, makeup and accessories that have enticed so many teenage girls to go and purchase these items to look like the Kardashian women, all the while knowing they either cannot afford it or their bodies are not shaped like any of those Kardashian women. In essence, reality television has a way of subliminally and blatantly promoting a look or lifestyle that persuades viewers to purchase the products or alter their bodies to get "the look." Furthermore, we see how intersectionality interrupts the structure of influence of the media with the synergy of consumerism entering into the picture.

### **You Look Like Jezebel**

Reflecting upon the influence that rap music videos have in our culture and on African American young women and girls in particular (since they are primarily the key features in scantily dressed clothing) I am witnessing an injurious contribution to identity and self-image disorder. The impact of the music video industry has many young girls wanting to imitate what they see and parents pushing their young girls to do. Facebook

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<sup>107</sup> Susan Kaiser, et al, "Beyond Binaries" 53.

<sup>108</sup> *Keeping Up with the Kardashian's* first aired on the E! Network October, 2007.

and YouTube have helped make that possible.<sup>109</sup> But there is much more to this denigration within the rap music video culture and that is the assault on black female imagery. The sad part, I argue, is that the females in the videos seem to be okay with the “look” – the look that portrays them as sexual objects, sexual tease and who Burrell describes as the 21<sup>st</sup> – century Jezebel. This Jezebel, he describes as a butt-jiggling, thong-tossing, pole-sliding gold-digger; a lustful woman with an insatiable sexual appetite who uses her body for money, vengeance or power – the gyrating rear in almost all hip-hop videos.<sup>110</sup> 2 Kings 9:30-37 gives the account of Jezebel’s fate. How she became associated with prostitution and harlotry and the color red is a wonder to me. The fact that she put eye makeup on and arranged her hair before her death does not lend credence to the association; then again, she was wicked, controlling and manipulative and with those traits (I imagine) able to get what she wanted.

One of the women at Berean shared the story about an experience she had when she was nine years old growing up in the south in the sixties and gave me permission to use it:

She was wearing a yellow top with white shorts. And her father said to her, “You look like a tramp; you’re not going into town with me looking like a tramp.” She said, at nine years old, I didn’t even know what a tramp was. But this incident scarred her self-esteem and her identity. As a result of this experience, she shared that for years she could not look in mirrors at herself, did not like herself or men because the scar was so deep.

Kelly Brown Douglas takes it a step further by adding the element of black spirituality to the sum wherein white culture’s sexual exploitation has had a profound effect in the black church. She explains that the manner in which black women are treated in many black

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<sup>109</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=young+girls+twerking](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=young+girls+twerking). (accessed January 12, 2015).

<sup>110</sup> Burrell, *Brainwashed*, 47.

churches reflects the Western Christian tradition's notion of women as evil and its notions of black women as Jezebels and seducers of men.<sup>111</sup> Not much has changed since 1999 when this was written in that most churches still require women and girls to cover their legs with a lap cloth when sitting in a pew or pulpit so as to not distract men. Jazmine Rogers, who was raised in the Church of God in Christ denomination writes in her article "Confessions of a Church Girl: What Should Matter in Church, the Heart or the Hemline of Your Skirt?" that "Thou shalt not wear red lipstick" should be the 11th commandment.<sup>112</sup> Red lipstick or any red garment in my day was frowned upon because it was equated with Jezebel. My mother was against red; she did not buy red clothes or let us wear red clothes, especially to church. I agree with Jazmine, there has always been a general code of dress when it comes to females and the clothing they choose to wear to church.

Yet, African Americans have found that dress and fashion are a means of attempting to reconcile the two ways of regarding the self – body and soul. Styling the self can be seen as a way of becoming through fashionable dress that both expresses and embodies emotion; and politics and aesthetics, by weaving these inextricably together.<sup>113</sup>

### **Modesty: Reverence or Oppression?**

Consequently, an even more powerful expression of the injurious levels of self-esteem among African American teenage girls and the impact on their clothing choices is to look at Christianity and the Bible. The Baptist faith tradition and biblical text has also

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<sup>111</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 83.

<sup>112</sup> Jazmine Denise Rogers, "Confessions of a Church Girl: What Should Matter in Church, the Heart or the Hemline of Your Skirt?" in <http://madamenoire.com/200937/confessions-of-a-church-girl-what-matters-in-church-the-heart-or-the-hemline/>. (accessed March 2014).

<sup>113</sup> See Kaiser, et al, "Beyond Binaries," 53.

contributed to the body image/self-image disorders when administered by those whose vantage point is that in Christ we are no longer ourselves, that our heritage and identity as African Americans is no longer necessary. This theological inference is contradictory to what Dr. Griffin expressed in terms of teaching people who they are, where they come from and what their cultural heritage is. Galatians 3:27-29 is a good example which states:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

As I reflected on this passage over the last four to five years, I began to see this as a grave injustice and as an obstacle that has prevented the church, in some cases, from not only owning their African heritage, but also not encouraging our girls to love their bodies. Love is embedded primarily in the faith tradition making the approach to deny oneself atypical and this pericope perceived as a misnomer. We are African American, Caribbean, Latinas/o made in the image and likeness of God, taken from our homeland Africa, indoctrinated into Christianity during chattel slavery in America and clothed with Christ. In other words, being faithful to Christ does not remove faithfulness to one's culture or heritage. Jesus Christ of Nazareth's Jewish heritage did not cease – he followed the customs and Judaic traditions written in Torah – however, as he ministered to the masses he proclaimed commands from God that called for embracing the divine heritage as children of God. In Matthew chapters 5 through 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, we see the evidence of Jesus explaining life-principles that differ from the rabbinical teachings of Torah. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?" (Matt 6:25) "When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were

amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” (Matt 7:28-29).

Conversely, another scripture that comes to mind which has strong androcentric roots that subjugates women and girls in the church is found in I Timothy 2:8-10, “I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” While this text is not contextually demeaning, it has been adopted by church leaders (men and women) who dictate how women and girls should dress particularly when coming to church. My generation experienced the three wardrobes as previously mentioned, and there may be those who maintain this tradition where dressing for church is sacred and demonstrates reverence to God.

Teenage girls are criticized and chastised for coming to church dressed “immodestly” or what is considered immodest based on the biblical text. Short skirts above the knee, spandex leggings with short tops exposing their body shape, or dresses with plunging necklines are examples of what I heard from congregants, both male and female, as what they considered immodest. There was a time when wearing pants to church was considered immodest. Subsequently, some of the responses from the female youth leaders reflect their disdain for pants worn by women in the pulpit, responses that have not been addressed individually or corporately. I was unaware this position existed among women in the church. This issue of modesty can be a blessing or a curse depending on who is administering the instructions and what doctrine is perpetuated. Yet the underlining issue becomes is it really about the dress or is it about the heart?

## **Denominational Instructions**

Rigidity or tension around clothing and faith has been an issue historically in many denominations. Somewhere along the timeline in Christianity, denominations created a standard of dress that marked them or set them apart from the others. According to Martin Connell, a significant marker of social change in the religious landscape was clothing.<sup>114</sup> For Quakers, pietists, and evangelicals, plain dress became a central expression of social and religious protest<sup>115</sup> – they equated simplicity and plainness with godliness. Methodists and Baptists regularly condemned all superfluities in dress such as wearing gold or silver, putting on ruffles or bows or sporting elaborate hairstyles. While various German groups such as the Amish, Mennonites and Seventh-Day Adventists held to plainness as a central expression of a more egalitarian, communal order.<sup>116</sup> In conversation with a co-worker recently, she stated that the Adventists still have issue with the way women dress in the church. They would prefer the plainness because it appears that the men are being distracted by shorter hemlines and bright colors.

Dress can be defined as apparel, garment, costume, clothing or attire. Dress scholars Joanne Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach Higgins define dress as an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements recognizing the strategic functions of the dress that materialize and their expressive abilities.<sup>117</sup> Dress is characterized according to cultural experiences and norms. Cultural anthropologists take the study of fashion and

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<sup>114</sup> Martin F. Connell, “Clothing the Body of Christ: An Inquiry about the Letters of Paul” *Worship*, 85 no. 2, (March 2011), 128-146.

<sup>115</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt “A Church-going People are a Dress-loving People: Clothes, Communication, and Religious Culture in Early America,” *Church History* (1989). 40.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>117</sup> Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, “Definition and Classification of Dress: Implications for Analysis of Gender Roles” *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 8 -28.

dress and look through the lens of a cross-discipline approach at how textiles, the dressed body, and adornment present symbolic meanings of clothing, examine continuities and changes in dress practice in the context of socioeconomic and political transformation.<sup>118</sup> In other words, from an anthropological standpoint, dress goes beyond covering the body to how societal and political dictates influence the frameworks of consumerism and capitalism and identity.

For the Church of God in Christ, dress was considered a part of sanctification and holiness – what was on the body was as important as what was in it. The leader of the Women’s Department of COGIC, Lizzie Robinson, instructed women to “Dress As Becometh Holiness” which meant that the body remained covered even in warm weather.<sup>119</sup> Rules for dress were reinforced by scriptural warnings. According to Anthea Butler, the dress code in COGIC first appeared in the 1920s as a response to the fashions women were wearing to the juke joints and speakeasies. Dress styles were one of the practices that posed problems for those who wished to become members in the Sanctified churches.<sup>120</sup> But more importantly, dress codes more than fasting and abstinence regulated sexuality. Young members had to attend a purity class, founded in 1926, in order to preserve a high moral standard of living among youth. The purity class is still in effect and active today.

The Purity Class is not an auxiliary outside of the church. There is no set of rules for the church body and another set of rules for the Puritans. We have been given the privilege to reach out and get that select group of Mr. and Miss Purity and Purity Class Blazers (which is the Junior and Senior Purity Class); to help mold

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<sup>118</sup> Karen Tranberg Hansen, “Anthropology of Dress and Fashion” Berg Fashion Library, 1-10. <http://goo.gl/Zwhe0p> (accessed March 3, 2015).

<sup>119</sup> Anthea D. Butler, “Sanctification as a Practice in the Church of God in Christ” in *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America 1630-1965*. Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, Mark Valeri, eds. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2006), 163.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid

their Christian character. Therefore, the Purity Lady must, by precept and example, be able to insist on a high standard of living and good morals. She must, with all diligence, try to save her Puritans from the evils of this society such as homosexuality, drugs and immorality.<sup>121</sup>

As previously mentioned, the onus of maintaining morality and reducing temptation has historically been placed upon women by the church – whether an assumed position or designated by church leaders.

Organizations also use clothing to communicate, sometimes by requiring a type of uniform. In an interview with Ruth Graham in the “Ideas” section of *The Boston Globe*, historian Sally Dwyer McNulty discusses her book *Common Threads: A Cultural History of Clothing in American Catholicism* and reveals how uniforms became a staple for the Catholic Church and school. She indicates, “Boys don’t become consistently uniformed until after World War II, and even then, “uniform” might be a strong word. For girls, the rules are stricter, and begin much earlier because the girls are considered more prone to sins of vanity. There is this belief that girls need to be controlled in this way or they’ll stray, that they’re more materialistic.”<sup>122</sup> McNulty discusses in her book how Catholic schools socially controlled female bodies. Uniforms were used to suppress status and sexuality. Nuns and women religious were charged with keeping young women modestly attired and did so through constant admonitions to control their bodies and ward off temptation. Not only that, the habits worn by women religious conveyed female submission, subordination, and denial of self.<sup>123</sup> As in Pentecostalism, there is an

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<sup>121</sup> <http://www.cogic.org/purityclass/our-history/>. (accessed March 4, 2015).

<sup>122</sup> Ruth Graham, “How Catholic Fashion Got That Way: Sally Dwyer-McNulty traces how religious dress evolved in America” *The Boston Globe* (May 11, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> Sally Dwyer McNulty, *Common Threads: A Cultural History of Clothing in American Catholicism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2014), 12.

underlying Catholic agreement that girls needed uniforms more than boys since the female was the temptress.

### Dressed in Our Sunday Best: A Base for the Problem

According to Anthony Pinn, dressing up in special clothes for Sunday worship goes back to the experience of chattel slavery in America.<sup>124</sup> It was in response to the dehumanization through the undressing and showing of black bodies on the auction blocks. Pinn conjectures, “the dressing in celebratory dress for special occasions such as church services was inspired by religion – a means to an end for African Americans, so to speak, to counter popular depictions of black bodies and soften the impact of chattel status on the carriage of the black body.”<sup>125</sup> Clothing spoke to a more liberated existence to the slaves because the value society or civilization was measured through dress. Moreover, after slavery, this expression of dressing for Sunday highlighted a sense of status and worth among African Americans and a deeper sense of religiosity.<sup>126</sup> But perhaps an even more powerful expression of the liberating gesture can be defined this way:

On Sundays, blacks moved along the streets displaying their finery, good taste, and achievements – exploring themselves through experiments with the body, decorating it, and moving it in ways that fought against the societal tendencies of the day.<sup>127</sup>

There was a sense of pride in dressing up on Sunday for worship that reverberated throughout the African American community whether north or south, rich or poor – families made sure that what they wore on Sunday reflected their very best, to feel good

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<sup>124</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, *What is African American Religion?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 22.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid. 59.

<sup>127</sup> Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 174-175.

about themselves and to reverence God. Furthermore, the dimension of class is added to the equation. According to Higginbotham, dressing up in one's best for the Black Baptist women equated with respectability and proper decorum, particularly to earn respect and support of Whites.<sup>128</sup> Much of this perspective, as Higginbotham asserts, was influenced by the women of the Talented Tenth and those who were educated whose felt that their outward presentation carried weight in the sociopolitical and societal realm.

There is dialectical tension around the discussion of dress in the church. Dressing up on Sunday for worship reflected a command in the biblical text in that it preferred modesty or modest dress for women. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God” (1 Tim 2:9-10 KJV). The Bible is the standard bearer in determining value systems and norms of the faith community, in the Baptist tradition; the Bible is the supreme authority. Women and girls were often criticized in the church when I was growing up for their clothing choices especially if the outfits did not fit the norm or standard of “Sunday Best” dressing. However, complex challenges are presented today when approaching teenage girls due to the shift in the values and societal norms – galactic shifts that are more problematic and multifarious.

The androcentricity that exists within the church and within the passages of the biblical text have dictated the standard of modesty and/or what modest dressing for women means. Paul’s message in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 has, over time, established a dress code or fashion culture within the church to impress upon women and girls that hemlines, necklines and certain sleeve lengths were inappropriate. In other words, the assertion of

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<sup>128</sup> See Higginbotham, *Righteous*, 14-15.

androcentricity can be made clearer when one considers the fact that the majority of fashion designers have been men who have stylized women from their perceptions of how women ought to be dressed or what was correct as a covering in each time period. At the core of this discussion around clothing and dress is the matter of how teenage girls understand and perceive their bodies, as well as how they clothe their bodies.

At Berean, women have relaxed their dress codes for Sunday worship. In comparison to Islamic and Jewish women, they have rebelled against the biblical text – pants are worn and acceptable for Sunday worship services as long as the woman is not sitting in the pulpit. Although the female ministers wear pants in the pulpit (myself included) other church settings find women in pants on the pulpit offensive and improper attire. A couple of youth leaders expressed this concern when asked the question on the survey what comes to mind when they hear theology of clothing. They responded appropriate attire in the pulpit – no pants for the women ministers.

Beyond this, the discussion veers toward the clothing choices that some of the teenage girls come to church wearing – in some cases without self-restraint. I have heard from different men in leadership saying, “Somebody needs to talk with these girls about their outfits, coming in here showing all their body parts,” or “Tell the minister in the pulpit her skirt is too short,” and I wonder what is really going through their minds for them to say that. Is this visual display of flesh, the body creating a temptation for the men to sin? Similar comments arise from pastors and clergy regarding appropriateness in dress. My pastor does not address the issue, nor has he approached me about any concerns regarding the way women or girls come dressed to church.

Jazmine Rogers argues that the church mothers with their stares and murmurings about what the younger women are wearing are trying to drag them back to the 60s

because times have changed.<sup>129</sup> I have not seen it done in Berean, but I when I worshipped at a Pentecostal Holiness Church the ushers would bring lap coverings to female parishioners because their knees were exposed when they sat down in the pews.. Or the case when I visited a church one summer wearing a sundress and the women from the church stood behind me as I praised the Lord so that the back of my thighs would not be exposed. I cannot recall any teenage girl or woman asked to leave Berean to go home and change, however. I have witnessed older women tell the younger ones that their spandex pants with a short top were not suitable as Sunday worship attire and asked them not to wear that style to church any longer.

### **Come As You Are!**

This brings me to the other side of the dialectical tension - the “come as you are” invitation – telling those not to worry about what they wear or have to wear, just come to church because God is pleased with their showing up. The biblical text is steeped with inferences regarding this come as you are stance because it denotes that what is most important to God is not what one is wearing on the outside, but what is being worn on the inside. Jam 2:1-5 (ESV) states it thusly:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

One pastor I spoke to retorted that sometimes we in the church deter young people from embracing change because of our approach to them about their attire. I witnessed this

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<sup>129</sup>Rogers, “Confessions of a Church Girl.” Ibid.

scenario in our church several times. I concur with Rogers nonetheless, who shared in her article an incident about a friend in church that was getting frustrated from all the side comments about her attire – her friend asked these questions: “Why does it even matter? When I was living like hell and my skirts were down to my ankle that was okay, but now that I’m actually living right and my skirts are a little shorter than before I’m going to hell with gasoline draws on? What is more important, my heart or my hemline?”<sup>130</sup> Do Christians purport emphasis on the outward appearance instead of the heart? Does God care about what we wear? Is appropriate dress a personal, cultural or social issue?

Compound the oppressive norms and complexities of bias in the church against women and clothing with the way women are viewed in general by the church and you uncover a greater injustice. In her book, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, Stephanie Mitchem posits that the experiences of oppression, including culture and spirituality, become the base from which womanists theologize about the meaning of church. And this emergent expression of oppressions is a result of the black church generally excluding women from formal leadership roles.<sup>131</sup> But perhaps an even more prevailing expression of ecclesial focus comes through the voices of Patricia Hunter, Karen Baker-Fletcher, and Emilie Townes who expand the ecumenical dialogue as they speak about the church structures and the impacts enacted upon black women.<sup>132</sup>

Patricia Hunter raises the point that black women are taught to distrust and fear other women and challenges African American women to learn to love self through understanding that all people are created in the image of God. Self-love is one of the

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<sup>130</sup> Rogers, “Confessions.”

<sup>131</sup> Stephanie L. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 127.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 127-129.

tenets of womanist theology and is critical to living out our days in relationship with God and humanity – the formation of the Cross – vertically with God and horizontally with humanity demonstrates this for us. 1 John 4:12 proclaims, “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister (v. 21).

Emilie Townes responds to the ecclesial focus by offering a series of questions that challenge the church structures and provoke communal engagement, another tenet of womanist theology - traditional communalism. For example: “What are we doing for the spiritual health of the people? What are we saying to the people?” I contemplatively perceive Townes as saying the church has to help its members embrace their own identity and rally together as community to support one another particularly teenage girls in their quest to know themselves.

Karen Baker-Fletcher observes that church is both transforming and transformative, operated by imperfect people and yet essential to the growth of the faith of believers. She also points out that church is not limited to the building or by the day of the week services are given, church happens among people. In other words, true church happens when people walk in the spiritual essence and praxis of *imago dei* understanding that church is not an event, but an ongoing experience of transformation one soul at a time.

How do we deliver a message of transformation and hope in Christ and allow the working of the Spirit of God to permeate the souls of our teenage girls if our efforts are on the exterior? Furthermore, what does the church need to do in order for teenage girls to grasp that the fabric of their lives are woven, knit together and intertwined with the

spirit of the Triune God? What gets us to the core of beauty? I believe the church is at a crossroads and in a position to address the image issues with our teenage girls (13-15) through the lens of intersectionality since there is a traversing of different dimensions of oppression for instance consumerism, sexism, colorism, as well as religiosity and the church.

**Research Question 3 (Practical Methodology): How do I create a “playbook” for youth leaders in the church that allows African American girls (13-15 years) to access the theologies of clothing?**

As theologies of clothing are complex and problematic, the mere inclusion of the biblical text is not sufficient. In answering the question how I would create a playbook for youth leaders in the church to allow teenage girls' access to theologies of clothing, other subsets of questions emerged: "How are youth leaders in the church (not) accessing theologies, particularly theologies of clothing? How are youth leaders in the church (not) teaching theologies, particularly theologies of clothing to teenage girls 13-15? What do teenage girls 13-15 know about theologies of clothing? What teaching strategies can facilitate successful access to theologies for African American teenage girls in the church?" As an insider researcher on the project, I used qualitative research methods – surveys, interviews, observations and a small group discussion with youth leaders and clergy at Berean. In addition, I drew on methodologies used by other researchers in determining methods to teach theological reflection and explore identities such as visual methodology.

*Participants*

We (the Site Team and I) chose African American teenage girls ages 13 -15, because we felt that it was the age group that was most impressionable and the age where identities are still in the molding process. As such, we wanted to work with them while they are still searching for identity and purpose in life. The age group is also dominant at Berean among teenage girls. In addition, African American teenage girls begin to explore and identify with universal values and morals. Research reveals other factors —African American teenage girls have to be concerned with defining themselves as African American, defining their skin color, belonging to an ethnic group and knowing what

boundaries exist for them in America because of their ethnic group affiliation.<sup>133</sup> The girls who participated in the surveys or workshops are members of the Girl Scout troop, teen Bible Study, drumline, and Sunday School.

I wanted to find out what social and/or religious constructs influenced the clothing choices of African American teenage girls. I used visual methodologies during three workshops – two at teen Bible Study and one with the Girl Scouts. The culture in modern society is a visual one, especially the younger generation due to the influx of digital communication. Visual culture is an important element of cultural studies especially “girl culture” and “tween girl” culture.<sup>134</sup> Surveys were distributed at the end of the workshops. This is not a definitive study and data collected cannot be generalized to larger population samples of teenage girls or the Black Baptist church.

Across my research, I aligned thematic results from interviews conducted with youth leaders, Berean clergy, and observations of youth ministry departments referencing a womanist theoretical framework. Alice Walker defines womanist from womanish in four parts: 1) as acting or interested in doing grown up doings, 2) appreciates and prefers women’s culture and committed to wholeness of the entire people male and female, not a separatist, 3) loves roundness, loves the Spirit, loves herself regardless and, 4) that womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. In this work, I use three of the tenets categorized by scholar and ethicist Stacey Floyd-Thomas, who renames Alice Walker’s definition of womanism as radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, and redemptive self-love. I use three womanist tenets redemptive self-love, traditional communalism and radical subjectivity – how they are promoted or not promoted within the contexts of

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas, *Adolescent Development*, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Cathryn Magno and Jackie Kirk, “Imaging Girls: Visual Methodologies and Messages for Girls’ Education” *Compare* 38 no 3 (June, 2008): 349-362.

leader's teaching and youth learning. In addition, I looked for themes that defined content that was beneficial to the playbook and to teenage girls, and themes that would shape the structure and content of the playbook.

#### *Practical Methodology*

To begin conceptualizing the data collection process, we (my Advisor and I) developed protocols considering the stakeholders of the project. In determining who the stakeholders were, we employed a visual methodology to determine who was important to talk with receive this information. We developed interview protocols for youth leaders/teachers on teaching practices, fashion designers on the social inspiration and spiritual influences (if any) to design for teenage girls, and for teenage girls to focus on the connections between spirituality and biblical assertions on clothing. Protocols were also created to conduct two focus groups with clergy – one to explore possible content of the playbook, and one to discuss theology and its presence in the church. We also developed protocols for focus groups to conduct with theologians to discuss theologies of clothing. In addition, we developed protocols for a focus group with teenage girls to explore their attitudes about clothing and knowledge of theologies of clothing.

#### *Interviews*

The qualitative research of the project involved interviewing youth leaders at Berean. I presented the project at one of the youth leaders meetings in September, 2014 and explained that I wanted to interview them. I discussed the possible time commitment and aim of the project. Five youth leaders were interviewed between September 2014, and November 2014. Each person represented the youth ministry they provided leadership to —Teen Bible Study, Sunday School, Youth Church, and Teen Ministry of Sacred Dance. Two of the interviewees are teachers by profession possessing teaching

licenses K through sixth grade. There were thirty-eight questions, and each interview lasted about twenty or thirty minutes. I informed the participants that the interviews would be recorded. One interview was conducted in person and the other four were conducted over the telephone. The interview protocol was structured into four sections; (1) current teaching practices: find out through current teaching practices what techniques they used, how they prepared lessons and how they handled challenges from youth; (2) teacher-student relationships: I wanted youth leaders to describe how they cultivated the best communication or dialogue out of the youth, how biases show up in teaching, and how they feel when challenged by youth; (3) assessment of self and youth: how they set goals for learning, track what is taught and how youth learn, and how they feel after teaching sessions; and (4) needs, supports and resources: what support is needed from the church leadership in order to be more effective and more knowledgeable about the Bible. I selected from the research what I considered to be the relevant issues expressed by youth leaders as it pertained to their understanding of theology and current teaching practices as it relates to the mission of Christian Education.

One of the observations pertaining to theology highlighted the need for clarity and understanding of the meaning of the word theology by youth leaders and that the work they are involved in is practical theology. A robust, healthy Christian Education strategy can ensure this element of teaching is included and is contextual to the faith tradition. While teaching styles are different, guidelines need to be established that ensure that youth are receiving the same information. The teachers/youth leaders expressed the desire of being involved in curriculum development, and wanted practical application to enhance their spiritual growth such as a separate Bible study.

I also interviewed the Senior Pastor in November 2014, a major stakeholder, to learn what his position was on theology and its presence in the church, and theology of clothing specifically as it relates to youth/teenage girls. I presented him with twelve questions and recorded the interview. After forty minutes of questions and dialogue, we were able to ascertain the effects of intersectionality – how consumerism, sexism and psychological issues play a major role in the clothing choices African American youth employ to cover themselves on the outside, oftentimes in destructive ways.

Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categories. In addition, he determined,

When you have a proper doctrine of humanity or personhood it can build on the other Christian motifs and beliefs that give us a balanced theology of dress or clothing. But the interesting thing is we have not had this conversation in Christian dialogue as much as we needed to, and it is amazing because it's almost as if we acted, as if we had no voice in this dialogue while the secular world is crying out for, and meeting the vacuum that has been created in very destructive ways.

Some of the questions asked were to hear from him why the word theology is not used in the church and his thoughts about theology of clothing. Some of the interchange is as follows:

“In your opinion, does God care about clothing?

“Of course, and we should care about clothing in view of our understanding of God. It was in the very beginning when Adam and Eve sinned, they sought to be clothed.”

“What are some of the other theologies of clothing?”

“It begins in Genesis, but throughout scripture we are reminded of various clothing that persons wore, like John the Baptist, who wore camel hair, Jesus wore a purple cloak, his only earthly possession of clothing during the time of Calvary. Paul refers to Timothy in the latter days of his life to bring his cloaks. It’s throughout the scripture. Even more so, the very fabric of Christian eschatology is that one day we will wear a white robe.”

How do you imagine theologies being taught at young stages so the youth can have access to them?

“I think the church does that, probably not in the best way because we don’t talk about it and don’t give the reasoning behind why we have certain expectations, rules and regulations as it comes to dress. I think if we were more forthcoming in helping people to understand why certain types of dress would be considered exploitative, oppressive and materialistic I think it would help people to have a more balanced perspective on dress. I think it’s huge particularly in light of some of the contemporary trends with the way young women dress, the way young men dress – it’s obvious they are dealing with some deeper needs that are not being explicitly addressed in other areas of their lives.”

The most profound words that emerged from the interview with Dr. Griffin pertains to the doctrine of humanity (Barth): “Teach me who I am from a biblical and theological perspective, because once you teach me that I am a human being made *imago dei* with intrinsic worth and infinite value then I don’t have to rely on any kind of artificial supplement to feel a sense of value and self-worth. That’s a good crux of the issue.” We discussed this in relation to youth having knowledge of their heritage and identity. Possessing this knowledge can provide a depth of self-worth and esteem that makes the choice to mimic others’ standards of beauty a lesser option.

Analyzing the interview, I draw on the womanist theological tenet of radical subjectivity defined by Stacey Floyd Thomas as, “a process that emerges as Black females in the nascent phase of their identity development come to understand agency as the ability to defy a forced naiveté, in an effort to influence the choices made in one’s life and how conscientization incites resistance against marginality.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, when African American teenage girls come to the knowledge of who they are they are in a better position to incite resistance against the negative influences that attempt to define them. I also draw on the biblical text of Psalm 139:13, “For you have created my inmost

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<sup>135</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Deeper*, 16.

being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

I consider the Pastor's discourse as one who is aware of and agreeable to program design and curriculum that will help move the church in a new direction of a stronger Christian Education model – a model with theological development that would be sustainable and transformative and provide space to discuss the impact and influences of clothing as well as space for discourse on sexuality and identity.

#### *Small Group Meeting with Clergy*

I sent an email to nineteen Associate Ministers at Berean to schedule a focus group in November, 2014 to discuss the project in order to obtain their thoughts on theology in the church, as well as defining theology(ies) of clothing. Three Associate Ministers responded, resulting in a small group discussion. Each one a women over 50 years old, and one is a teacher by profession. There were seventeen discussion questions, including questions that pertain to their perspective on theology in the church and theology of clothing. I explained what theology of clothing could mean, referencing the creation story, Adam and Eve's fig leaf designs, and God's design for the priestly garments before they responded to the question. After the explanation, they were able to associate how their conversion or transformation in Christ caused a change in their wardrobe. The group discussion was recorded and lasted about one hour. It was held in the church's fellowship hall.

#### *Surveys*

For clergy members that were unable to attend the small group meeting, I emailed them the same questions and also placed in their mailboxes at the church. Three ministers responded one male and two females. I also distributed the same survey to youth leaders

in order to determine what they knew about theology in the church, and theology(ies) of clothing to help argue that theology of clothing is not well circulated or articulated by youth leaders to African American teenage girls. Five youth leaders responded – one male and four females.

I was able to juxtapose youth leaders' perception and knowledge of theologies of clothing alongside the clergy at Berean for a comparative study. Comparing the responses from the youth leaders and clergy, it is evident that theology(ies) of clothing is not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to teenage girls. Inconsistencies in references to theology exist between clergy and youth leader, yet the word is unanimously misunderstood. Both groups reflected agreement in several areas: 1) the congregation should understand theology and what their theologies are, 2) theology can be presented creatively in the church, 3) teach theology to make it more explicit in the church utilizing sermons, Sunday School lessons and discussion, and 4) teach to youth in order that theology becomes practical and contextual.

The question was: What do you think about when you hear theologies of clothing? The responses varied from "Jezebel" "whore" "seductive boundaries, prostitutes," to "a different attire for worship" "robes or modest attire" "women not wearing pants in the pulpit" "study of biblical clothes" and "covering." The implications put the burden or the onus of morality on women. Nevertheless, both groups believed that making theology(ies) of clothing more accessible to youth can be done interactively through created space, by example, and workshops/experiments. (See surveys and protocols in Appendix 2.)

#### *Workshops with Teenage Girls*

I asked the Youth Pastor if I could conduct two workshops within the teen Bible study on the first two Wednesdays in January, 2015 focusing on body image and identity. Twelve youth were present for the January 7th session. For the first workshop, I modified one of Dorothy Bass' exercises from the "Bodies" chapter in *Way to Live: Ideas for Growing in Christian Practices with Teens* Leader's Guide from their website.<sup>136</sup> I made it relevant to our audience, time and space constraints. We used mirrors and had the youth (boys included) look at themselves and discuss what they observed, using one sentence then passing the mirror to the next person. They were asked if they recognized God's image when they looked in the mirror. The purpose of the exercise was to bring awareness to youth the importance of honoring the human body – their own and others, and to live in ways that honor every-body as created in God's image.

The other activity for the evening entailed focusing on body consciousness. The youth were told that they had to stand under a signage that applied to their individual perception. For example, "My body is my own business. I do with it what I want." The signs read, "Agree, Disagree, and Not Sure." They were asked to defend the reasons for standing under a particular sign. The majority of the youth believed that what they did with their bodies were their business even though their bodies were the temples of the Holy Spirit. A few believed however that they did God a disservice when they dishonored their bodies. I used Psalm 139:13-16 as the Bible study portion for discussion.

The second workshop on January 14<sup>th</sup> entailed having youth insert profiles of their bodies on large pieces of paper that were provided to them. After laying on the paper, another participant drew the outline of their body type. They were then instructed to record in the outline what they were feeling at that time: what was in their mind, in

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<sup>136</sup> Bass, *Way to Live* Leader's Guide. [http://waytolive.org/waytolive\\_leaders\\_guide.pdf](http://waytolive.org/waytolive_leaders_guide.pdf). (accessed December 15, 2014).

their heart, what qualities made them unique, and a message to their feet. This activity is a component exercised in the formational prayer ministry as part of the healing from past trauma process. Observing the activity was interesting – some were detached, some bonded with the image and laid on it to write, while others wrote from the side. However, the more time spent in the session, the more they connected with themselves. They were then requested to share what they wrote about themselves without being judgmental or critical of others. Some were angry; many were bruised and emotionally malnourished and not happy with how they viewed themselves. The evening ended solemnly and in instances tears were shed. The scripture for discussion was Colossians 3:5-17 as we talked about being a new person in Christ and getting rid of the anger and lifestyles that were opposed to the new life in Christ. The images were preserved with the Youth Pastor to revisit at a later date.

I requested permission from the leader of the Girl Scouts for the opportunity to conduct a workshop with the girls to explore how they connect attitudes or feelings with clothing. I was given the second Saturday in January, 2015. Thirteen girls participated along with five young adults. Since many of the girls are not members of Berean, I was an outsider researcher in this particular case. The Leader explained what I was doing and informed them that their participation in the workshop provided credit for a self-esteem badge they could earn. I wanted to find out if the girls discerned or saw connection to their moods/attitudes and clothing choices. For example, I asked them when they wake up in the morning how they felt, and how they selected the clothes they were going to wear? The answers varied from:

1. “I wear a uniform so I have no choice, but on the weekends, if I’m feeling like blah, I’ll put on sweat pants and a t-shirt.”
2. “If I wake up feeling bad, I will wear all black.”

3. “I lay out my clothes for the week and do not deviate from those selections no matter how I feel.”

The overall experience revealed an apprehension to discuss their inner feelings with a stranger, yet it stimulated excitement and appreciation among the older girls to pay closer attention to how they make clothing choices.

An overall evaluation was provided to the participants in both workshops (excluding the boys) in order to receive feedback on the experience and body consciousness. The survey (see Appendix 2), consisted of twenty-one questions and was based on a rating scale of 1 – 4 with strongly disagree and strongly agree at the extremes. Disagree and agree were 2 and 3 respectively. Twenty-five surveys were distributed with thirteen responses. Based on the responses, I concluded that most of the girls had a healthy attitude about their bodies; however, there were a few who did not have a healthy attitude. I plan to encourage dialogue between these two groups of girls in order for them to work through the issues amongst themselves with adult supervision.

Another implication of the survey revealed that clothing is an identity marker, and a reflection of how girls feel in general and about when they get up in the morning. This implication is also confirmed by Fashion Psychologist Dawnn Karen who branded Fashion Psychology, a newly applied academic discipline that studies color/fashion and its effects on the human behavior while addressing cultural sensitivities and cultural norms.<sup>137</sup> Karen illustrates the relationship between mood and clothing choice by using sweatpants as an example to demonstrate mood illustration and mood enhancement. Mood illustration suggests sweatpants as having the connotation of grogginess and sleepiness; when one wakes up in the morning feeling groggy, they may put on sweat pants (one of the girls from Girl Scouts indicated this). Mood enhancement is when one

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<sup>137</sup> Dawnn Karen, [www.FashionPsychologySuccess.com](http://www.FashionPsychologySuccess.com). (accessed March 15, 2015).

puts on sweatpants and then feels grogginess or sleepiness no matter what mood they woke up in.<sup>138</sup> The majority of the girls agree and strongly agree that based on their mood when they awake, they make their clothing selection for the day (unless they wear a uniform). I plan to do conduct further studies in the area of mood, colors and clothing choices as it pertains to Black teenage girls from various demographics.

When asked if the way they dress matters to God, and if their faith-walk influenced their clothing choices, the majority agreed that it did. There is an opportunity for theological discussion as to the origins of the belief and why it exists among the girls; and how the faith factor influences their choices. I also propose teaching girls through workshops or a rites of passage-type program on how to know self and not rely on artificial supplements to define themselves since many agreed that the media affects their self-image.

### *Observations*

I observed the youth groups between September, 2014 and December, 2014: the teen Sunday School classes, Girl Scouts, Youth Church, and teen Bible study to understand how teachers/youth leaders teach and how the youth participate and learn. I used the womanist tenets of self-love and traditional communalism as a barometer for coding an analyzing data. The purpose of observation was an attempt to ascertain what the church is currently administering in terms of youth leaders/teachers theological development, how the youth ministries are structured, how youth participate (or not) in their spiritual growth, and explore if issues around clothing are discussed. My observation allowed me to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in the youth ministry. Youth leaders are committed to serving and teaching, which is evident in the involvement

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<sup>138</sup> This illustration by Karen was featured in Claudia Williams' article, "The Psychology of Fashion" *Drakemagazine.com* (May 2014). Ibid.

and the attention they provide youth both collectively and individually. They provide space for youth development and minister in a tutorial manner similar to the way the Apostle Paul did with Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:14).

Spiritual tools are provided to the youth through Sunday School lessons and Bible studies, practical tools such as applying scriptures to decision making. Lessons are also designed to provide spiritual and practical takeaways the youth can apply at school, in personal relationships, and in their homes. According to Dorothy Bass and Don Richter in their book *Way to Live*, life does not happen after high school, you have talents and passions today. You have a heart and mind and soul and strength today. You have the ability to help – or to hurt – other people and the earth today.<sup>139</sup> In other words, youth leaders can help youth practice living out the abundant life with God now.

Youth that attend Berean do so for a variety of reasons, to see friends, to get educational support and to experience worship. Observing them in the respective ministry settings proved that they are free to ask challenging questions. And in a few cases, they are afforded the opportunity in facilitating lessons. However, they appear to experience difficulty embracing their oneness with the triune God. They do not see the need for a character or lifestyle change. Some of them do not see the need to respect adults, or anyone else for that matter because they receive no respect in return. What was apparent is the detachment to the embodiment of God within them, even though the majority was baptized. Additionally, the reason for the detachment has a lot to do with the lack of

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<sup>139</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, eds. *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), 5.

reading and a relationship with the Bible – the vast majority refuses to bring their Bibles to Bible study or church. Those who do bring Bibles do not use them out on account of peer opinions. Even though technology has provided a means to access the Bible on cell phones, IPads, etc., (and they walk with these) I consider knowledge of the paper version prepares them to navigate through the digital version.

I deduce from observations that the following patterns were revealed: youth are encouraged to participate, youth ask questions/want to know more, teachers engage youth/don't do all the talking, teachers make the biblical text relevant and contextual, teachers want youth to “get it”, and youth are open to discuss life issues. The patterns were coded with the womanist tenets promoted or not promoted. Redemptive self-love - reaffirmation, beauty of black women, I am black and beautiful; radical subjectivity – feisty, womanish, an intelligence grounded in wisdom from deep within; and traditional communalism – loving connections, relational bonds to restore young women with self-awareness and communal pride. Redemptive self-love was not promoted in the vast majority of cases which is skewed from the surface. Taking a closer look, the analysis applies to cases where youth were disruptive, lack of understanding of theology of clothing and teenage girls not loving themselves. Where self-love was promoted it referenced girls whose images of themselves were positive and not affected by media. Traditional communalism was promoted unanimously because of the teachers' methods of teaching and radical subjectivity was largely promoted because of how youth participate.

One limitation is that youth ministry is more than activities and games. While that may be a necessary learning tool for younger children, it does not enhance the spirituality of eight year olds and above. Youth Church can be more effective if it is designed as a

worship experience. I suggested to the leaders of the Youth Church to consider the following idea: teach a lesson one Sunday, then designate a youth to bring a follow-up message the next Sunday; collect an offering, sing songs, read the scriptures, and pray so the youth are better prepared to assimilate into the larger congregation with a better understanding of what the worship experience is about.

Nevertheless, clothing and issues around clothing did not materialize in any of the settings that I observed. No one was criticized for what they were wearing or asked to change what they wore to church or to the respective youth ministry session.

### **Building the Foundation for the Playbook**

At the present time Berean has no formal guidebook to address or present a theology(ies) of clothing. The Christian Education curriculum does not include theology(ies) of clothing as a topic for exploration corporately as a church. I investigated resources for inspiration as well as those discussing theologies of clothing (biblical theologies of clothing in particular) and approaches that were being administered to inform African American teenage girls. I discovered at the onset that the selections were lean—there were no publications or magazines specific to African American teenage girls' self-image or fashion and faith on the shelves of Christian book stores. Scanning through lists online, I was able to identify a few sources that were instructional, however, they were not contextually representative of the culture of African American teenage girls. I realized that there is a dearth of material and information that specifically addresses the body and self-image disorders that teenage girls experience resulting from media influences and the false imagery it promotes from a biblical perspective. African American teenage girls do not see enough positive images or realistic images that encourage them to love themselves and to see themselves made in *imago dei*.

Feminist bell hooks reflects upon the era when black liberationists recommended that black folks see themselves differently through self-love – the slogan “black is beautiful” worked to intervene in and alter those racist stereotypes that had always insisted black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable.<sup>140</sup> Thin bodies of models portrayed in fashion magazines are not reflective of the norm across cultural boundaries. I have listened to a number of teenage girls lament how unhappy they are with their bodies because they do not look like those that they see advertised in the media.

I acquired relevant resources after conversations with womanist theologians and seminary professors involved in youth ministry, who made valuable contributions to this effort. Dr. Lorena Parrish introduced me to the work of Evelyn Parker, Professor of Practical Theology at Southern Methodist University, who authored several books on African American teenage girls and spirituality, *The Sacred Selves of Adolescent Girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class and Gender*, and *Trouble Don't Last Always: Emancipatory Hope Among African American Adolescents*. In conversation with Evelyn Parker, she recommended that I purchase the book by Patricia Davis, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls*, and *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* by Dorothy Bass and Don Richter. After purchasing these books, I was able to acquire a more in depth understanding of ways to help teenage girls connect their bodies with their spirituality. Jacqueline Sullivan’s book, *Girls to Pearls: A Young Woman’s Guide to Living Life Freely, Loving God Naturally, and Surviving Puberty Successfully* while not specific to African American teens it is a close contender as an instructional guide book/playbook.

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<sup>140</sup> bell hooks, *Killing Rage Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1995), 121.

Interestingly, while sorting through recipes, I found an article that featured a former beauty pageant queen Nancy Redd, Miss Virginia 2003 (also in the top ten in the 2004 Miss America pageant). The article was intriguing because it highlighted her views pertaining to the concerns teenage girls are confronted with regarding their bodies. She wrote the book, *Body Drama*, a pictorial about real girls, real bodies, real issues and real answers. After reading the book I was convinced that it was an excellent resource to discuss transformative body experiences with teenage girls. *Body Drama* is important because it counters the biblical ethos about nakedness being sinful and something to be ashamed of and it helps youth leaders, parents or guardians make teenage girls comfortable talking about and having relationship with their bodies.

The Black church has not done an adequate job about discussing nakedness and body consciousness because of the implications from the Adam and Eve story depicting nakedness as sinful and therefore something to be ashamed of. This ideology is the reason why many African American girls become statistics in the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy largely because of the miseducation about their bodies. Womanist theologian and scholar Kelly Brown Douglas in her book *Sexuality and the Black Church* contends that black women and men, girls and boys, are losing the battle for self-love.<sup>141</sup> The Black church has been the sanctuary of life in the Black community yet silent on the issues of sex, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, and even sexual misconduct among clergy and other Black leaders.<sup>142</sup> Douglas was clear that a sexual discourse of resistance is necessary in helping Black men and women recognize how the White cultural exploitation of Black sexuality has corrupted Black people's

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<sup>141</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Markyknoll: Orbis, 1995), 142.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 142.

concepts of themselves, one another, and their God. It is important that youth leaders are equipped to discuss the issue of nakedness, body image and sexuality with teenage girls, and the church more proactive in discussing identity and self-esteem with African American teenage girls.

Utilizing the above resources, I was able to clearly see the void in guide books and it confirmed my aspiration in creating a meaningful and powerful resource for African American teenage girls surrounding the issues of faith, fashion and dressing from the inside out.

### **Other Models**

Other models that I considered are to visit other youth organizations and churches with robust youth ministries that focus on the spiritual development of youth and who witness the manifestation of their faith as demonstrated through their external choices. I met a woman while studying in the library that came over to me, and shared her faith by handing me her business cards. She was a Buddhist. I received them and told her what I was working on which piqued her interest. She disclosed an occasion when a young woman attended the Buddhist Center in Manhattan, with blue hair and wearing men's boots. After two months of attending the Center, her style changed and the young woman was transformed. That is what I would like to witness—by observing how others are preparing and shaping youth to embrace the divine within them and when they do, something changes on the inside because it is evident on the outside.

I also plan to visit websites, read books/magazine articles, and watch movies about girls and by girls with youth leaders as a means of helping girls practice critical theological questioning and critical consciousness. It is also my desire to create a space

where girls can develop their own website containing beauty tips, discuss fashion and faith after becoming familiar with the program in the created “playbook.”

Through ongoing ethnographic study at the church, I plan to continually investigate ways teenage girls view themselves, what they call themselves, and how they connect clothes with attitude or character through creative and cultural methods. One method is intergenerational sister circles that provides a forum where teenage girls might dialogue with older women and learn ways of confronting oppression, colorism, sexism, and racism. Additionally, I plan to employ visual methodologies—art and photo imagery, along with journaling as a means for teenage girls to embody liberatory theologies that counter oppressive norms for Black teenage girls.

While I understand that this list is not exhaustive of all of the methods available they are viable in shaping the ideology and hermeneutical reference of the Black Baptist church culture and able to highlight ways to help teenage girls shape their spirituality and knowledge of theology of clothing.

### **Methodological Options for Addressing My Challenge**

In ecclesiastical circles, a major requirement in constructing methodological models for ministry requires that participants have a relationship with the triune God. Ministry is carrying out the commands of God as representatives in the earth. And it is by the power and presence of God that we are able to manifest the character of God through our ministry and gifts. The First Testament provides us with a case study in Exodus that allow us to glimpse the divine intervention at work in structuring methodologies for the creation of the tabernacle, priestly garments, the Ark of the Covenant, the table, lampstand and altar of incense. Chapter 33 informs us that a tent of meeting was set up where Moses inquired of the Lord. The Lord would speak to Moses fact to face, as one

who speaks to a friend (v.11). Weary from leading the Israelites, Moses asked God to provide him the know-how: “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me...If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you” (v12-13). Moses had a special relationship with God that afforded him direct access to God. Today, we are permitted to access a similar relationship with God through worship, praise, scriptures and prayer.

What Moses organizes in chapter 35 is a replicable model to implement when establishing new ventures or creating new projects:

Moses said to the whole Israelite community, “This is what the Lord has commanded: from what you have, take an offering for the Lord” (v4). “All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded: the tabernacle...the ark...the table...the lampstand...the altar of incense...the curtains...the garments – the woven and the sacred” (vs. 10-19).

Ideally Moses orchestrated God’s plan with the support of all the people who had the skills and knowledge in the aforementioned areas – requesting them to come forth and participate in creating God’s vision for doing ministry in a new way – a designated place with special, sacred items and garments. The text explains that everyone brought their resources to the table: gold jewelry, yarns, skins, goat hairs, leather, silver, spices, oil and wood; additionally, they brought their talents to the table: spun yarn and goat hair, and fine linens – all free will offerings for the work of the Lord.

Exodus chapter 35 also reveals how God imparted the necessary skillfulness in two young men who apparently did not have the capabilities:

“See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze...and he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others...” (vs 30-35).

For this project, creating a “playbook” for youth leaders to access theologies of clothing requires that I first seek God’s input to assemble a great team of willing and skilled workers to form a working team who understand the vision, the charge, and have the know-how in communicating with teenage girls. This working team is inclusive of teenage girls so they can be a voice for the present. The present voice is important because sometimes adults forget what adolescence feels like, or they are not up to speed communicating with youth, how they describe life events or what they are thinking in regards to today’s culture. From my position as researcher conducting this project and as a participant in the youth activities over the past two years, I was confronted with the reality that I was unaccustomed to their vernacular and how they interpreted life. In some cases, I had to ask for the definitions of certain words and phrases that youth use such as “OG” which means old gangster and is a term of endearment towards an older person who is “on fleek” or on point.

Another reason to have teenage girls on the team is to create a sense of ownership and sustainability because when youth have a voice and a presence in matters that concern them the value of the outcomes have greater meaning and longevity. Having teenage girls as co-researchers in the project provides insight into their worlds by listening to their stories, brings awareness to the power dynamics between adults and teens, and stimulates subjectivity versus objectivity – teenage girls are not objects to be studied, but participants with agency.<sup>143</sup> I witnessed this scenario while observing the Girl Scouts a couple of times during their meetings. Young women who were prior Girl

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<sup>143</sup> For youth as co-researchers see Nadjwa E. L. Norton, “Talking Spirituality with Family Members: Black and Latina/o Children Co-researcher Methodologies” *The Urban Review* 38 no. 4 (November 2006), 313-332; Stephanie Petrie, Lisa Fiorelli and Kate O’Donnell, “If We Help You What Will Change? – Participatory Research with Young People” *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 28 no. 1 (March 2006), 31-45; and Dawn E. Trussell, “Unique Ethical Complexities and Empowering Youth in the Research Process” *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 26 no. 2 (Summer 2008), 163-176.

Scouts years ago come back to help the leader out with the younger girls and offer their time to dispense wisdom in the leadership process – things they learned from being a Girl Scout.

Other roles or area of expertise that work well for the working team members to possess are fashion stylist or fashion designer, parent of teenagers, teacher, social worker, prayer warrior and youth pastor or minister. Qualities such as good communication skills with youth, listening skills, creativity, knowledge of the biblical text and leadership capabilities are also deemed necessities for the team to possess in order to be able to create a successful program and document. I believe as Moses did in the book of Exodus that if God ordains a person to participate in this construction project God will endow them with the blessings, gifts, skills and heart to be effective. What impresses me most about the construction project in Exodus is how the people kept bringing their resources to assist to the point that Moses had to turn them away.

I have solicited the support of the following types of persons to work on the team (however, the team has not been organized):

- a fashion stylist who teaches at the Fashion Institute of Technology and who professionally styles commercials and ads for major corporations;
- a fashion designer with patternmaking experience and also a teacher;
- a women's fashion boutique owner and public speaker with experience in putting together large-scale events;
- a middle school teacher who is a prayer warrior;
- a father of girls and youth leader, photographer and a member of the Diaconate ministry;

- a social worker with experience in formational prayer and healing of traumatic wounds,
- a youth pastor and Associate Minister experienced in communicating and advocating for youth education and justice, and a good listener; and
- two teenage girls (13-15), one a member of the church and one a non-member.

The rationale behind the decision and that of some of the Site Team members to have such a multifaceted group is so that we can explore this project and the needs of teenage girls through the lens of holistic ministry. In other words, constructing a theology of clothing and allowing teen girls to see themselves in the image of God will mean they will have to start from the inward parts, their emotions, attitudes and thoughts (because these impact their clothing choices) then connect these with the clothing styles/types that reflect their personality and body shape. Therefore, each person will need to know how to inject their level of expertise to the creation of the playbook. This includes any prior experience working on a rites of passage or any other form of program where teenage girls went through a transformative process. Not only that, the Exodus case reminds us that God strategically created the construction of the tabernacle and all of its parts to be handled by a team that conjunctively worked together – a complementary team.

Most critical to the process of know-how is developing the right questions to ask in a survey, questionnaire, focus groups or interviews. How you ask a question can make a difference in the response you get. Once you determine what research tool you are going to use, the purpose of your study should guide what you will ask.<sup>144</sup> My

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<sup>144</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Cal S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1998), 218.

experience during this process of study and research has clearly indicated that I need to be more critical in defining the scope, the outcome and analysis of each workshop, Bible study or any group session with teenage girls and youth leaders. On one occasion, while facilitating the workshop with the Girl Scouts, I had the most difficult time getting them to respond to a question I asked. Some of the girls responded with intent and agreeability initially while others remained skeptical and distant. Perhaps one reason is because they were uncomfortable or unfamiliar with me and two, the questions were not typical for them – the topic related to body image and how they saw themselves. One of the girls eloquently came to my rescue saying, “Why don’t you just ask a different question?”

That remark was liberating because it reminded me that I was just as vulnerable, uncertain and skeptical as they were and I was open to the suggestion. I did not exert my researcher power as the authority in this case, nor was I offended. Instead, I was able to create a space where the walls were lowered and a path to dialogue opened. Afterwards, I recognized how important developing and knowing the right questions to ask in order to produce the desired result in regards to data collection and analysis.

Patricia Davis’ writing is uniquely positioned to offer an insight into one of the major concerns of adolescent girls – girls have trouble being understood and being taken seriously by the adult world that has so much power over them.<sup>145</sup> Through her research, Davis interviewed over 100 adolescent girls during a four year span investigating how they understand and value spirituality. She concluded that adolescent girls want the adults and the church in their lives to drop the niceness code, listen to their sometimes difficult voices, and move toward real relationship with them.<sup>146</sup> This project and “playbook” can

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<sup>145</sup> Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. xi.

also be cognitively understood as a team effort involving other ministries in the church and the pastor to create synergy and impacts by creating the village model of teaching and understanding a common theme.

## **CHAPTER 4** **PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION**

### *An Unfashionable Attire: Styled by God*

I began the project with the idea that I would combine my passion for fashion and working with African American teenage girls in a spiritual context to create a movement – “Styled by God” —that would bring both passions together through a life enrichment process. Since this exploration of clothing and African American teenage girls began, and since discovering the void in African American teenage girls experience to develop their identities through the teaching in the church, I determined to provide space for teenage girls to develop their own theology about clothing and to impart, for their learning, what it means to dress positively from the inside out.

I envisioned a “playbook” as the culmination of the demonstration project, which teenage girls could use as a guide in helping them understand what inner dressing was all about. Not only that, the “playbook” represented a process (akin to a rites of passage) in which the girls would participate, and at the end of the program they would have the opportunity to shop in a school bus retrofitted into a closet filled with clothing and accessories. The idea of the school bus closet was birthed after my encounter with Kit,<sup>147</sup> a teenage girl who participates in the drumline and teen Bible study, who needed a ride home one evening. The two of us never met before that night, however, she was assured

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<sup>147</sup> I am using Kit as a pseudonym.

by the Youth Pastor that I was trustworthy to take her home (she lived in a shelter and was self-conscious about that). While driving we talked about what was going on in her life. Before departing I asked her if I would see her in church on Sunday. She replied, “No, because I don’t have anything to wear.” Immediately I went into the “mama-consciousness” mode that familial mode womanist theologians refer to in traditional communalism where mothering and community intertwine, and I offered to take her shopping. She agreed with the idea after I explained that having nothing to wear should not be an excuse to miss attending church, and we set a date to go shopping. What happened during the shopping spree confirmed my initial thoughts regarding church clothes – in Kit’s mind there was a difference between church clothes and clothes worn to a party or going out. After venturing into the first store and looking around, she said, “Let’s go to a different store, I don’t want these kinds of clothes, I want church clothes!” My heart leaped as I tried to contain my excitement I then asked her, “What are church clothes? She said, “You know, like skirts and blouses; these clothes are party clothes.” That made my heart smile, and confirmed that the project had merit. At the end of the day, she left the mall with several bags of “church clothes” and shoes, and we brought the excursion to a close over lunch.

The school bus will be provided by one of the largest, local school bus companies in Brooklyn, a client of the not-for-profit organization where I work. I proposed the “Come Shop in My Closet” idea to them in January 2014 that included diagrams of my design. (see Appendix 5) The owners let me know that my proposal received a favorable response from the partners – they loved the idea and offered their support to the project. My last conversation with them was in January 2015 when it was determined that I would have the primary pick for a bus after the school year ends in June.

## **Goals and Strategies**

The goals established in my proposal changed after meeting with my advisor in May, 2014. It was determined that more scholarly assessment and reflection needed to be done to grasp the real challenge. Therefore the problem in the challenge statement changed from:

Statistics show that African American teenage girls between the ages of 13-15 do not exemplify the image of God through their style of dress.

to

Theology(ies) of clothing is not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to African American girls (13-15).

Based on the original goals established in the proposal, I listed the first goal, to raise awareness in Berean along with three strategies to accomplish this.

The first strategy entailed preaching an introductory sermon at Berean to bring awareness about the “Styled by God” movement of dressing from the inside out to the congregation. My objective was to deliver the sermon during Fashion Week (between February and March). I met with my pastor to discuss my project and how it will benefit the teenage girls in the church. I reviewed my proposal with him after it was approved and appreciated his input, encouragement and support. He was straightforward with his approval to move forward with the project, and confirmed that this work—teaching girls to dress from the inside out was groundbreaking. When I explained that my first goal entailed bringing awareness through preaching, I was afforded the opportunity to preach for the upcoming Sunday service (which was a few days away). I convened a conference call with my Site Team to discuss how we could create the most effective way for the congregation to evaluate the sermon and their knowledge of the subject matter revealed in the sermon. After discussing the idea at length, we agreed through consensus that a pre

and post-test questionnaire for the congregation on that Sunday to ascertain what they knew beforehand and how the sermon provided new information was too much to ingest in one sitting. The complexity of the matter was overwhelming therefore no evaluations were created or distributed. The recommendation from the Site Team was to critically think about what we wanted to accomplish through the survey, what the processes and desired outcomes would be, and then create a questionnaire/survey for a later distribution to smaller, more contained groups.

I preached the introductory sermon on Sunday, March 9, 2014 entitled “*Let God Dress You*” from Col. 3:12-14. The sermon addressed how emphasis has been placed on the external – the outward appearance to form judgments of social and economic status over the last century. Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae emphasizes the spiritual attire, the intangible clothes worn on the inside that allows the new convert, through baptism, to “take off” the old life and to “put on” the new life that is achieved as an outcome of their faith. In essence, Paul stressed how important it is for believers to put on Christ’s character in order to survive the worldliness on earth since they have been baptized in his name (Col. 3:5-15). It is God’s desire that humanity reflect the nature and character of the godhead; therefore God dresses us in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and love. When these inner clothes are worn, humanity is dressed from the inside out – dressed in the uniform of love designed by the weavers in the heavens. The sermon was perfect because it was on a Sunday that baptism took place.

I was unable to create and distribute pre- and post-questionnaires to evaluate the sermon response, however, the sermon was recorded and CDs are available for sale. Several congregants shared their appreciation for the message, and bought the CD.

Women, in particular, connected with the message as eight women joined the church, surrendered their lives to Christ and sought baptism, or to become a member of the church through Christian experience.

The second strategy in the original goal entailed designing a Styled by God logo, and to hire a teenage girl to design a newsletter/blog as a way to keep girls informed about fashion and faith. This did not materialize.

The third strategy in the original goal entailed presenting the Styled by God concept at the church's annual women's conference in March. My objective was to solicit participants to become a part of the working team.

I prepared a brief workshop on style and identity for Berean's Annual *My Sister, My Friend* women's conference on Saturday, March 15, 2014 for girls 12-17 years of age. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the subject of inner dressing by way of discussing style and identity. I wanted to observe how teenage girls identified style and fashion and how they viewed themselves. I created a pre- and post-questionnaire for the girls to complete before and after the workshop. I sent the questionnaire to several members of the Site Team in order to receive feedback regarding the structure of the questions. Having expressed their concern, they determined that I needed to rephrase some of the questions, since the vast majority was open-ended. Eight of the girls completed the pre-test questionnaire, and three filled out the post-test questionnaire. The disparity however, is due to the timing of the workshop—it was the last workshop on the schedule at the end of the day (3 pm). By that time the girls were tired and disengaged having been at the conference in various workshops all day. They were less attentive and many of the girls who were at the conference earlier left.

One of the activities that I facilitated with the girls required them to form groups of three. Then as a group they were requested to look in mirrors that were provided in the room. The assignment entailed describing what they saw in the mirror. Surprisingly, we (myself and another youth leader) were met with resistance by two of the girls who had difficulty coming to the mirror to look at themselves. One of them began to cry hysterically because she could not do it. When you look at both girls they are beautiful, attractive yet they did not embrace their self-worth or embody self-love. Since they were in groups of three the other two members were asked to support their sister with encouragement and they were able to get them to look at themselves. As a group, we briefly discussed why there was so much adversity with the two girls looking at themselves and how we can support them going forward. One of the girls stated because she did not feel pretty, and the other girl, being a twin, is darker than her sister and felt the backlash of being the dark one therefore felt ugly. This incident made me realize that colorism is prevalent among the young people, and how the insidiousness of this ism affects them especially when it is fostered by their peers in the church and also by family members.

An additional purpose of the workshop was that of soliciting volunteers to be a part of the working team whose role would be to help develop the playbook. Part of the strategy entailed signing up at least eight persons interested in becoming a part of the team. I enlisted four volunteers who believed the project was worthy of their time – three women and one teenage girl. Two of the women were not members of the church.

The evaluation of the workshop was discussed with the Youth Pastor (a member of the Site Team) who reminded me that framing questions and knowing how to ask the right ones during presentations and surveys, was a critical aspect of data collection.

Reality set in as I recognized that I no longer spoke the same language as today's youth and that it had been a number of years since I had any direct involvement with teenagers. Nevertheless, the awareness strategies generated interest in the church and several women offered support, fashion ideas and books they considered that might be helpful to me personally and the project.

### **A Change in Plans**

After selecting my advisor in May, 2014, I shared my proposal with her and scheduled a time for us to meet after she had an opportunity to read it. Unprepared is an understatement for the honest feedback she provided me. In essence, she explained that the proposal contained too many biases and judgments about teenage girls, and that it was not scholarly, and filled with assumptions. After discussing the project at length, we walked through a series of tough questions that were designed to define the true embodiment of the project and critically think about the overall impact it would have for teenage girls, other stakeholders, and the church in general. Questions emerged such as the following:

- What is the real problem?
- Why do you want to do this?
- What do you really want to know?
- What audience do you want to talk with?
- What do you want to talk to them about?
- What assumptions are you bringing to this work?
- What theoretical frameworks are you using?
- What do you know about methodology?
- What exists on the theology of clothing?

After finishing the discussion, we were able to identify several areas that needed revision, and that would produce a sustainable and impactful model of transformation and information. I chose to use a womanist theological framework in this project as a means of relating to the way Black women name God and the new ways to listen to Black women's voices<sup>148</sup> in relation to the way African American teenage girls develop their spiritual voices and how they see themselves through sociocultural lenses. And because of the rich themes found in womanist theology that grows out of an individual and communal reflection of African American faith and life and my own theology of Black liberation, it was a valid connection.

During the process of redeveloping the challenge statement, two thematic questions materialized that brought clarity and focus: the first one related to my role with teenage girls in the church - was it direct or far removed; and secondly, was the problem really about the way teenage girls dress or was there a deeper concern being uncovered? It was determined that in order for the "playbook" to be a sustainable product it would need to be envisioned in a way that youth leaders could use as a teaching tool. Additionally, the deeper meaning of the problem was not about the girls' attire but conceptually about a theology of clothing, and how a theology of clothing was not being well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to teenage girls. (See Appendix 1, chapter 3 for revised goals and strategies)

### **New Goals and Strategies**

In response to the theology(ies)of clothing now the focal point and an unfamiliar subject to me, the first goal consisted of understanding the similarities and differences of theologies of clothing. To accomplish this goal, I employed three strategies: biblical and

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<sup>148</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing*, 72.

historical research, document analysis of artifact collection and focus groups with clergy and theologians. The strategies involved reading twenty books and six articles regarding theology of clothing, and conducting two focus groups: one with Berean clergy and the other with theologians.

I gathered articles on theology of clothing through a Google search and through ATLA/EBSCO Host for the scholarly biblical theology of clothing articles. Artifact collection began as I gathered magazine articles, news clips/comics, daily Google Alerts “Teenage Girls and Fashion” and videos that related to the topic. Additionally, I conducted research for books to find out who was specifically discussing theologies of clothing. I accomplished the first goal of raising self-awareness.

The second goal entailed raising the awareness of theologies of clothing within Berean. The strategies that were employed are:

Strategy 1 – Preaching two sermons to continue keeping theology of clothing before the Berean congregation. Designing and distributing a pre and post survey among a random sample within the congregation.

Strategy 2 – Conducting interviews with the pastor, youth leaders, Associate Ministers, and African American teenage girls (13-15) as well as hosting a focus group with each sector in order to pull together information that will be useful for the construction/design of the playbook.

Strategy 3 – Conduct theological discussions within small groups of youth leaders about theology of clothing and design teaching materials to help youth leaders to adequately discuss the subject.

I worked with my advisor in developing protocols for clergy and theologians for focus groups, and protocols for interviews with youth leaders, and fashion designers. I

scheduled interview sessions with youth leaders after sharing the project with them at one of the youth leader meetings. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and recorded between September, 2014 and December, 2014. The focus groups did not occur. The session with clergy at Berean turned into a small group session that was held at the church. For the clergy that did not attend the group session, I distributed the same questions asked in the group in the form of a survey. The focus group for theologians did not occur as well, however, I interviewed two and had conversations with two about theology of clothing and their understanding of what that meant and what resources, in their opinion, would be helpful to the project. I plan to conduct a focus group with theologians because it would be insightful to discuss theology(ies) of clothing and how they impact women and girls in the church.

I preached a second sermon, “The Fabric of God’s Grace” in September, 2014 without evaluation forms. I conducted interviews with five of eight youth leaders out of eight who work with teens and the Senior Pastor. The same survey that I distributed to the seventeen ministers at Berean I gave to youth leaders during the February, 2015 youth leaders meeting. Five out of the thirteen that were present responded. I interviewed two theologians in person, and had a conversation with two others, one session was conducted over the telephone and the other one in person.

### **More Work to Be Done**

I realize that the project is essential and will shape the spiritual lives of not only African American teenage girls, but Black girls in general; therefore I spent the majority of my time researching theologies of clothing and seeking answers from theologians and members of clergy. This information is encapsulated in my first goals. In so doing, my other two goals: (1) create a playbook to explain how youth leaders can teach theology of

clothing, and (2) to embody liberatory theologies and practices that counter oppressive norms for women and girls were not accomplished leaving more work to be done to bring the project to completion. I believe because of the time spent in research that my interaction with my Site Team was limited. Two members actively supplied resource materials; two others allowed me access to their teenage girls for workshops and Bible study. The strategies for completion include the following:

- Interview fashion designers and stylists that design for and dress teenage girls. I believe this component is critical to the contribution of theology of clothing and helping African-American teenage girls understand the process of how garments are created for them and allow them space to comment on what they see and want to wear.
- Design questionnaires for teenage girls that will produce data regarding their attitudes about clothes/colors, their knowledge of their self/body-image using samples from churched and non-churched girls.
- Organize the Working Team and set up first meeting to discuss the “playbook” design.
- Develop the curriculum, establish a timeframe and begin to set up the training module for youth leaders.
- Finalize the selection of a graphic designer to design the cover for the “playbook.”
- Continue to host ongoing Styled by God workshops with teenage girls (13-15) around the areas of body drama, identity and theology of clothing, inviting fashion professionals and ministry leaders who are astute in fashion, esteem building and styling; along with myself to present theology of clothing. The workshops will be offered at Berean and other churches.
- Continue to preach and teach about theologies of clothing to the congregation and others.

- Conduct group discussions with men and women to discuss how theologies of clothing impacted the fashion choices, expectations of and treatment of women and girls over time.
- Design and implement public service announcements on how theologies of clothing impacted the fashion choices, expectations of and treatment of females over time.
- These activities and events will serve as the basis for data collection and analysis that will go into creating and publishing the *Styled by God: A Girl's Guide to Dressing from the Inside Out* playbook.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **EVALUATION**

#### ***Style Decoded***

The evaluation of the project is based on the research questions and my understanding theologies of clothing. The reason is that the majority of the work on the project focused on research to fulfill the goal of self-awareness and awareness at Berean. For question one – is there enough information available to help frame the project? And, is there enough information to formulate my own ideas? The project presented a challenge on account of the difficulty in locating resources on theologies of clothing and resources that are specific to African American teenage girls' faith and fashion. While there were several books available on faith and fashion, and dressing modestly (particularly in the Christian bookstores), the guidebooks that African American girls could relate to are limited or nonexistent.

What I discovered is that a lot of research exists on colorism, spirituality and identity crisis in African American girls. I highlight the work of Evelyn Parker, who has conducted research with adolescent African American and girls of color which is in the nascent stage of this type of connectivity between spirituality and cultural identity. This work has not permeated our church. Womanist and black feminist theologians have worked on the issue of identity, sexuality and faith for women but their scope of work does not deal with teenage girls, which I consider a missing component in developing healthy self-love going into adulthood. There are pockets of information out there yet not culled together. The library at the Fashion Institute of Technology has

limited resources in terms of specific books pertaining to clothing teenage girls and theologies of clothing. The limitations that I experienced provided a foundation that asserts a need for more research on theology of the intangible clothes and teaching African American teenage girls to dress from the inside out. I believe this work is very important both spiritually and culturally, because it not only helps girls develop healthy self-esteem, self-worth and spiritual praxis, but it will help future generations sustain a right relationship with the Triune God, with community, with church and with themselves.

### **Methodologies**

The practical methodologies used to gather information about theologies of clothing amidst the Berean clergy, youth leaders and youth made me realize that I am not ready to produce a playbook – there is so much groundwork to be laid. However, evaluating preparedness and readiness can be determined by these test groups indicating a signal for the next level. Interviews were most effective because it directly engaged people in discussion which worked best in this situation. In addition, the small group session and the observations of the youth ministries worked well, indicating that theologies of clothing are not articulated or well circulated, that youth leaders need theological training and information and that the church needs cohesive teaching on theology. The methodologies that worked best with youth were the creative methods, the visual methodologies since their world is overwhelmingly visual. I plan to utilize visual methodologies as part of the youth leaders training including usage of the documentaries on body image disorder as training tools for skin as clothing.

## **Surveys**

Surveys work well because they are easy tools of evaluating methodologies that are very concrete. However, the most critical aspect in survey design is to ask the right questions. Important in my case is to determine how to solicit more participation. This may entail making surveys shorter, making the language in the surveys more accessible, and using electronic surveys for improving participation and data collection.

## **Ethnographic Fieldwork**

The benefit of the evaluation method is that it can serve as an auxiliary to monitor results of other research methods. For example, before a survey is generated, the ethnographic fieldwork can help determine what types of questions would work best in the survey, or after the survey check on the veracity of the answers given by the population selected to see if their answers match their perceptions. Continued ethnographic fieldwork in Berean and other churches in different demographics, small group discussions and interviews with fashion industry leaders, teenage girls, and youth leaders will hopefully provide additional data for analysis. This method will also allow me to gather testimonials from the girls I worked with, as well as the youth leaders as a means of evaluating if and how learning about theologies of clothing affected their ministries.

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups is a participatory means of gathering information and determining the variables at work in a study environment. The small group that I conducted with Associate Ministers served as a means of ascertaining what they knew about theology and theologies of clothing. I plan to use focus groups as a means of obtaining feedback and information from theologians, teenage girls and other members of clergy.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the data collected, I make the following recommendations:

1. Develop a strong and healthy Christian Education model and protocols for church leadership, ministers, youth leaders and servant leaders as a collective effort to make them knowledgeable about theology in word and praxis.
2. Ministers and youth leaders agreed that the congregation and ministry personnel should have access to and understand theology where the information is trickled down from the pulpit. Therefore, sermons should be more informative to help congregants understand they have a theology.
3. Create space for contextual learning, particularly for youth through arts, culture, Bible study, Sunday School and Youth Church.
4. Make resources available to youth leaders in order for them to become better equipped in their understanding of theology in general, and theology of clothing in particular (e.g. books, audio/visual equipment, supplies). Additionally, youth leaders want to be involved in collaborative planning, peer involvement, and curriculum development—provide them the opportunity to accomplish this feat.
5. Organize conferences for teenage girls on fashion and faith once a year based on biblical principles to help them develop a healthy relationship with themselves and with God.
6. Create a “playbook” for youth leaders which will hopefully create a model of transformation through a rites of passage-type program for teenage girls to learn to dress from the inside out.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES**

#### ***There is a Way That Seams Right***

The Site Team and I reviewed ministerial competencies comparatively and were unanimous in our agreement pertaining to my abilities, skill sets, ministry, knowledge, and passion. We critically looked at listed competencies in relation to their importance in working with teenage girls, and determined which two competencies would enhance the project. The two areas of competency I am referring to are Technology and Social Media Management and Religious Educator. Effectively conversing with teenage girls in the 21<sup>st</sup> century entails cultivating the competence to communicate with them through social media and technology, and with comprehensive biblical teaching.

My goal for developing the technology and social media management competencies entails familiarizing myself with the latest technology and popular social media used by teens. The goal for developing the religious educator competency entails reading books and watching videos specific to teaching youth.

#### **Technology Background**

Youth born during the era of the nineties were born on the cusp of the information age while those that were born in the new millennia were directly immersed in it—for these millennials the primary way for them to communicate is digital. I find myself being forced to communicate with my daughter and granddaughter via text messages—impersonal to me, but nonetheless it is their way of communicating. If I need to

communicate with teenage girls, I must understand what is important to them and what social media platforms they use to communicate. The opportunity exists to explore life and its meaning with them through the various media, expose them to information they may not be aware of and expound on biblical truths with the online tools that enable interlinear study.

There is no doubt that technology and communicating digitally is the preferred method in which people interact with each other in 2015. This method is no longer the sole province of the wealthy and elite who were previously the ones that were able to afford costly mobile phones, and other electronic toys/devices. A handheld portable phone was considered a gimmick, a "look what I got!" rich man's toy with dubious utility.<sup>149</sup> Reflecting on such times reminds me of how swiftly technology has evolved—every few months a new version of software is presented as new products and devices seemingly enter the marketplace before older versions are mastered.

With all of this in mind, I am challenged to stretch myself in the area of technology and social media management, particularly in the context of communicating with teenage girls. I understand the empirical implications that the information/digital age presents. We have been provided with a large window in which to look out and see the world in ways we have never experienced before. Yet, there is an inherent responsibility given to humanity to maintain information. My generation has not done a great job at preserving the oral tradition of telling stories. Therefore, I am concerned that a large chunk of history will end up missing because the storage of information will not be accessible hundreds of years from now to decipher it.

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<sup>149</sup> Stewart Wolpin, "The First Cellphone Went on Sale 30 Years Ago for \$4,000" in *Mashable*. <http://mashable.com/2014/03/13/first-cellphone-on-sale/>. (accessed November 29, 2014).

Accordingly I challenged myself to become more adept in the area of technology and social media management. The church experienced a paradigm shift with technology and digital communication. According to Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson, “digital ministry is the set of practices that extend spiritual care, formation, prayer, evangelism, and other manifestations of grace into online spaces like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.”<sup>150</sup> The authors have partnered to demonstrate how ministry and praxis can be executed in a shared way through social media without losing the foundations of ministry, doctrinal truths or biblical content. They also determined that there are two essential elements to having a successful digital ministry – presence and voice. Site Team members indicated that I was not afraid to employ technology to communicate my message. This is true. Nevertheless, I can do more to enhance my presentations and knowledge employing social media and current apps. In light of this, my goal to accomplish this is twofold. First, I wanted to familiarize myself with the latest social media platforms and how teenage girls are using them to see the world and themselves.

The proverbial phrase “knowledge is power” is often quoted to youth as a means of encouraging them to seek knowledge and understanding of a subject. The biblical text also tells us in the proverb “my people are destroyed from a lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). The hope is that with this information I will be in a better position to inform youth leaders, youth pastors/pastors and parents to know the language and the euphemisms that are used in youth’s digital conversations for greater understanding of communicating with them. The second goal was to improve my use of technology and how technology would enhance this project.

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<sup>150</sup> Elizabeth Drescher & Keith Anderson, *Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 1.

## **The Social Media Challenge**

The methodology used to fulfill the first goal of familiarizing myself with the social media and apps teenage girls were using was to inquire about what they use and take a survey to confirm what they used. We designed a short survey to gather information that asked what social media they used, which apps they used, what were the benefits of using the social media/apps and who taught them how to use them. I distributed the survey to the teenage girls at Berean who were members of the Girl Scouts, Drumline, Sunday School and Teen Bible Study. From the 21 teenage girls (13-15) who participated in the survey:

- 16 listed Instagram as the most frequently used social media platform;
- 14 of the girls use Facebook for social media;
- 14 listed Instagram as one of the top apps used;
- Kik Messenger, Pandora, and Flipogram are also among the most preferred apps listed.
- The major benefits in using social media are: communicating in multiple ways with friends; entertainment; helpful information; and connecting to friends and society. Two wrote that receiving likes on their selfies is a benefit.
- 19 of the girls taught themselves to use social media; while 2 were taught by others (parent or friend).

The apps that are new to me are Kik Messenger and Vine which the majority of the girls appeared to use. Kik Messenger is a life-like chat messaging experience with a built in browser. In an article by Helene Fox, she explains that Kik enables users to send private messages to other individuals using the app. She also informs parents about Kik

Messenger stating: “The issue here is that there is no validation of users during registration so user kikgrrl16 could actually be a 30-something year-old man looking to communicate with teenagers.”<sup>151</sup> Vine, produced by Vine Labs Inc. is a free, looping video app that has twelve channel categories to view videos already created. According to the company description, “Vine is the best way to see and share life in motion. Create short, beautiful, looping videos in a simple and fun way for your friends and family to see.” Those who create and post videos are called “viners.” Videos can be posted to Vine and shared on Facebook or Twitter. Snapchat is another app for parents and leaders to be aware of. With over 100 million current users, the app enables you to send messages including videos and photos that disappear after a few seconds.

The majority of the girls in the survey indicated they use social media as a means of finding out what was going on in the world, to connect with friends, get school information, to be entertained/ listen to music and get likes on their selfies. One stated that she uses social media because she does not watch television. Dr. Wendy Rice, in her article “*Why Parents Can’t Be Dumb About Social Media*” posits that it is important for parents to learn about the social media platforms and have access to their children’s activities, pages, and sites.<sup>152</sup> She also lists a few resources and tips parents can use to become proficient and current with what youth are using. I found one resource to be extremely helpful and informative about the latest apps, social media and video games that helps parents, leaders and other stakeholders in youth ministry, *Commonsense*

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<sup>151</sup> Helene Fox, Teens, Tweens and Technology: Sites and Apps a Parent Needs to Know, *The Positive Community*, September, 2014.

<sup>152</sup> Wendy Rice, Why Parents Can’t Be Dumb About Social Media, *The Blog, Huffington Post*. 11/06/14. (accessed December 1, 2014).

*Media*. In an article by Kelly Schryver, she lists these fifteen apps as the place teens are socializing in:<sup>153</sup>

## 15 Social Media Tools Parents Need to Know About Now

Twitter	Oovoo
Instagram	Ask.fm
Snapchat	Yikyak
Tumblr	WhatsApp
Google+	Omegle
Vine	Yo
Wanelo	Whisper
Kik Messenger	

What the article also provides, that is extremely informative to me, is a brief description of what each app does and why they are appealing to teens. It is important to note that the overall use of Facebook by teens decreased in the last two years with Instagram becoming the app of choice, according to Bianca Bosker who helpfully points out in her article, “Teens Are Leaving Facebook for Facebook.”<sup>154</sup> The title of the article confused me at first, but then I understood that Instagram is owned by Facebook who purchased it for \$1 billion in 2012 – a strategic move the company has adopted when their users flock

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<sup>153</sup> Kelly Schryver, [blog] “15 Sites and Apps Kids Are Heading Beyond Facebook,” *Common Sense Media*, July 20, 2014. <http://goo.gl/DLvtWW>. (accessed December 1, 2014).

<sup>154</sup> Bianca Bosker, “Teens Are Leaving Facebook for Facebook,” *Huff Post Tech*. [www.Huffingtonpost.com](http://www.Huffingtonpost.com) 04/11/14 (accessed December 1, 2014).

to the competition. Facebook also purchased WhatsApp for \$19 billion in February, 2014.<sup>155</sup>

Although I was not a subscriber to Instagram, I learned about it from my friends, coworkers and family members who were using it in conjunction with Facebook and Twitter. However, since I purchased a new LG Tablet, I downloaded and registered on Instagram and shared my first “grammy” (photo) on December 2, 2014. Not only that, within minutes followers were looking at my photo. There is still much more to learn about navigating through the app but I have already solicited the help of my granddaughter who has the expertise with social media apps.

On account of the accessibility and shift in technology, what has become evident to me, is the fact that teens are using their cell phones as computers, especially since the creation of smart phones that offer a computer experience in the vein of browsing and using the Internet and downloading apps. According to a survey done by Piper Jaffray in 2014 among 7,200 teens, 67% use the iPhone.<sup>156</sup> Whether shopping online, listening to music, taking pictures, making videos, watching television or movies, playing games or reading books, teenagers’ use of cell phones are multifarious. To further illuminate this, an article written for the Pew Research Internet Project reveals that in the past five years, cell phone ownership has become mainstream among even the youngest teens. Fully 58% of 12-year olds currently own a cell phone, up from just 18% of such teens as recently as

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<sup>155</sup> Adrian Covert, “Facebook buys WhatsApp for \$19 billion” *CNN Money* 02/19/14. <http://money.cnn.com/2014/02/19/technology/social/facebook-whatsapp/>. (accessed December 1, 2014).

<sup>156</sup> This survey was done as part of the Piper Jaffray 28<sup>th</sup> Semi-Annual Taking Stock with Teens Survey, Fall 2014. Piper Jaffray & Co. reports. <http://www.piperjaffray.com/private/pdf/TSWT%20Infographics.pdf>. (accessed December 3, 2014).

2004.<sup>157</sup> Today, six year olds such as my coworker's daughter are requesting cell phones as Christmas presents. I wonder, is the digital/information age is crippling our youth in the sense of their basic learning or achievement ability? In other words, is the reliance on apps and the tapping of a button becoming a hindrance to learning basic reading/writing skills, or is it an advantage?

### **The Technology Challenge**

I described how social media have spiraled over the past several years in the lives of teenage girls, in addition to the goals I established to meet those challenges. In addition to improving my knowledge and usage of social media in this ministerial competency, was that of enhancing my knowledge of technology. The strategy I chose to accomplish this goal of increased knowledge entailed attending two workshops or webinars to learn how to use technology smarter, particularly pertaining to the project.

I was challenged by my advisor to identify any blogs and/or websites created by African-American teenage girls. Determined to accomplish this, I researched sites created by African-American teenage girls that were reflected the culture, beauty and fashion savvy or informational. I was disappointed to discover that this genre of online information was lacking, particularly as it pertains to websites or blogs created by African American teens regarding identity or self-esteem. Yet, there are many websites created or designed with teen girls in mind. For example, there are a large number of websites that presented hair styles for African American girls at the top of the search engine when I requested websites created by African American girls. On the other hand, I

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<sup>157</sup> Amanda Lenhart, Kristen Purcell, Aaron Smith and Kathryn Zickuhr, *Social Media and Young Adults* in Pew Research Internet Project 02/03/10. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/02/03/social-media-and-young-adults/>. (accessed December 2, 2014).

discovered several sites that encourage, empower and inspire African American teenage girls:

- [Afropuffsandponytails.com](http://Afropuffsandponytails.com) - the website for Afro Puffs and Ponytails, Inc. the Inspiration of African American Girls. This organization offers workshops, suggested reading materials, and special events for teenage girls.
- [Blackgirlsrock.com](http://Blackgirlsrock.com) - Black Girls Rock! is an organization created by an African American young woman who saw the need to empower and enrich the lives of girls aged 12 to 17 years old through mentorship, arts education, cultural exploration and public service.
- [averbalsoul.com](http://averbalsoul.com) - is a blog created by a young, African American lesbian woman who uses poetry to express herself through the lens of sexuality and love.
- [Lovingthemelisee.com](http://Lovingthemelisee.com) – is a website created by an African American woman who believes that if girls are reached at an early age they can learn to value their self-worth and esteem their amazing character.
- [preciousprettypowerful.com](http://preciousprettypowerful.com) – is a website pointed at anti-bullying and leadership development for young women with emphasis on young women seeing themselves as queens.
- [blacknaps.org](http://blacknaps.org) – is a website created by an African American woman that promotes natural hair care for African American women with information, product suggestions, styling tips and how-tos, and feature stories about hair.
- [Commonsensemedia.org](http://Commonsensemedia.org) – this organization has created an extremely resourceful website for youth leaders, parents and youth – they rate, advocate and educate regarding the latest technology, products and services that affect youth.

The availability of online choices that African American teenage girls have access to that deals with identity and self-esteem are not as relatable or well representative of them—the girls are thin, invariably not African-American, and promote European standards of beauty. The images perpetuate a culture that “black is ugly.” Viewing the documentary *Dark Girls*, it was evident that from early childhood African American girls do not

consider themselves black, nor do they desire to be called black.<sup>158</sup> To this end, the identities of African American girls are influenced by propaganda that is disseminated on the Internet, television, videos and other media. However, I strongly believe that as it pertains to youth leaders and faith leaders, the development of meaningful websites, how-to videos, and blogs by African American and brown skinned teenage girls can be produced. It is unmistakable that the *Styled by God* movement for girls will have an online presence with particular emphasis on engaging African American teenage girls to write, share and encourage other girls about faith and beauty.

I was also challenged to create a video about theology of clothing using certain apps such as Animoto, a music compilation for theology of clothing in Spotify and create a presentation using Prezi. Using the free trial period of Animoto, I created a short video using some photographs of the priestly garments from my travels to Ethiopia. The application inserts music for the background and loops your photographs in a video format.<sup>159</sup> Type in “theology of clothing” in Spotify to listen to the music album created featuring a few songs that inspires looking at oneself in the mirror and the characteristics identifying the inner person.

Another improvement of my technology competency came in the form of new equipment – a new cell phone and a tablet – upgrades that enabled me to participate in smarter and faster ways of communicating. These new “toys” stretched me immensely and welcomed me into a realm of technology where my understanding of how technology works across a broader spectrum in small devices was heightened. In other words, I can sync the applications from my laptop to my phone and tablet, and vice versa and have

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<sup>158</sup> *Dark Girls* Duke and Berry.

<sup>159</sup> To view the Theology of Clothing sample video, click on the link <https://animoto.com/play/r40YtI4AkZCfhaW7YTkeVg>. (created November 11, 2014).

access to my information, files, contacts, books or photos irrespective of my location. I am still in the adjustment phase and have solicited the help of my twenty-one year old granddaughter who taught me how to navigate the phone and tablet.

Many of my peers in ministry have been using iPads or Kindles during preaching assignments. For a long time I was hesitant to utilize such devices because of the fear that the device might black out or cut off, or that I would lose my place at any given time. Yet, I uploaded my sermons to the Kindle because I wanted to try it, yet, I would bring my printed copies as my security blanket. Consequently, I overcame that hurdle when I was invited to preach at a women's tea in October 2014. I was unable to print out my sermon and was compelled to use the electronic version. I did not experience what I was most afraid of, and a new level of confidence emerged.

The initial strategy to attain the goal of the technology competency was to attend two webinars. Interestingly, I not only participated in two webinars, I also presented my demonstration project to youth leaders on a pilot webinar presented by the Lily Youth Theology Network on November 20, 2014.<sup>160</sup> I contacted this group through FTE because of the cross section of youth leaders who teach theology to teens/youth and because I thought it would be a good resource. This was their first webinar and they were of the opinion that my presentation would be a good pilot for them. We rehearsed the prior week to ensure that technical issues would be worked out and prepared for the live webinar. I prepared a power point presentation summing up my project and was given 25 minutes to present. The experience was an interesting, albeit somewhat impersonal because it felt as if I was talking to myself. In fact, I was disheartened that I could not get what I needed from them – a discussion about how they teach theology to youth.

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<sup>160</sup> Lilly Youth Theology Network website, <http://www.youththeology.org/webinars/>.

However, I did get positive feedback from the directors of the program who thought theology of clothing for teenage girls was an excellent idea.

The first webinar I attended on May 3, 2014 was entitled, How to use Pinterest for Marketing given by Melanie Duncan where she discussed the power of “pinning” and how to create meaningful content to get noticed through Pinterest. Pinterest is a site that offers its subscribers opportunity to bookmark what they like, sort of like an electronic bulletin board where you pin photos, notes, videos - things that you like, and others get to see what you pin. If they like it, they will pin it on their boards and their followers get to see thereby making Pinterest a useful place to get your ideas seen by a large and wide audience. This is a useful for Styled by God to pin fashion and faith images by and for African-American teenage girls, ministry and marketers.

Next, I attended a webinar on blogging entitled 6-Figure Blogging Secrets presented by Matt and Bradley on May 12, 2014 who demonstrated how to create content for a blog, but more importantly how to make money from your blog. The blog discussed how blogs are used to generate followers and interest in your topic. Both of these webinars add value to the ongoing project since I want the teen girls to create a Styled by God blog and also share how-to videos and photos on Pinterest.

In addition, I attended an Introduction to Social Media class offered by BRIC|ARTS Media Brooklyn at the New Lots Library on October 1, 2014. This workshop discussed the benefits of hashtags and how they can help make your voice or mission get exposure and how to engage church groups, community building, and group targeting. The instructor also stated that hashtags should be specific, in particular for my project; I can find out where teenage girls are through hashtags and create hashtags that would connect with teenage girls and other stakeholders.

### **There is a Way That Seems Right**

I considered myself computer savvy with the ability to create promotional materials and transmit them electronically through my graphic design business. I also have basic knowledge to accomplish tasks through word processing software. My technology/social media journey has not only been a rewarding experience, but it has also allowed me to venture into new territory and progress in others. Increased knowledge of the subject has far exceeded what I knew before I started the project. I achieved the goals I established for myself and made definitive strides in becoming more adept in my use of technology and social media.

Up to the present time, the app world was not my primary source of communication, even though I used several apps for acquiring information, and personal use. With the addition to my technology skill set, I am better equipped to assist my church—there is always an opportunity to post video clips on social media of what is transpiring at the church, in addition to forming collaborations with the community when special events occur. Such collaborations are also a way of engaging the talents and interests of teenage girls and young adults in the congregation and providing them with the opportunity to teach the older generation social media skills. I can also conduct business differently with the assistance of technology by accepting credit cards with the Square Reader that I purchased.

Taking into account the combination of the technology challenges, the new communications devices/equipment, subscribing to new social media sites, downloading new apps, attending the webinars and having conversations about what teenage girls are using through surveys, equates to the reaching of several milestones in the fulfillment of

this goal. Mapping the milestones in my technology competency achievements can be expressed to some extent as follows:

Technology Used Before	Technology Used After
Phone (Blackberry): Calls, Photos, Bible Email, Facebook, Camera  Alarm, Internet Browser Music/Pandora (not often) Calendar, Scrabble (not often)	Phone (Windows Nokia 830): The phone came with 58 apps installed including Lumia Beamer that allows me to share whatever's on the devices at the same time with a scan code Instagram, Kindle, Bible  LinkedIn, Netflix, Pandora, YouTube, Soundhound, Flashlight, Family Group, Best Friend Group
Laptop:  Microsoft Office Products Graphic design software, Skype Facebook, LinkedIn, Pandora Google Products, Internet Dropbox, Media Player	Laptop:  The same as before with the addition of Spotify, Kindle, Square Reader, Animoto, Fitbit
Kindle:  Amazon books, Pandora, Scrabble, Docs,	Kindle:  The same as before but with the addition of Spotify
	Tablet:  Came with 38 apps installed (some same as phone) including cameraI added Instagram, Kindle, Twitter, Pandora, Square Reader
Social Media Before	Social Media After
Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter	Same as before but added Instagram and Spotify

I increased my technology acumen with the addition of four new devices, created a music album and video, have access to a plethora of apps and subscriptions to three additional social media platforms.

### **Religious Educator**

The additional ministerial competency needed to broaden my scope for ministry is to expand on my role as a religious educator particularly with youth. Seminary opened a door to a world of biblical knowledge, theoretical frameworks and theological development that was unknown to me. Introductions to theologians and early church fathers whose work and words I have since grasped and shaped my theological thinking and hermeneutics which were made possible. On account of this learning, I recognized that teaching the biblical text is not a narrow focus but magnified through a wider lens of understanding different cultures, backgrounds, beliefs and social locations.

Nevertheless, it was determined that I needed to develop an understanding of how to instruct youth, since I was lacking in this area of expertise, how to understand their learning process, and how to be resourceful in order to help youth leaders be more effective in helping youth learn and develop their spirituality. Therefore my goal is to create a bibliography specific to identifying teaching resources; in addition, acquire and read fifteen (15) books and watch six (6) videos that directly or indirectly had youth in mind.

### **Christian Education and My Reflective Pedagogy**

Prior to my ordination in 2009, I was actively involved in Christian education at Berean. I was a member of the Christian Education steering committee that developed the curriculum for the Christian education of youth and adults, and designed the process of educational advancement of students. For many years, Berean offered biblical and

spiritual study during Christian Education week — a week where a variety of topics were offered and taught prior to the church's annual revival. For several of those years, I was invited to teach different topics: spiritual warfare, spiritual gifts, and prayer. The prayer class turned out to be an ongoing class for two years and was taught with my colleague and prayer partner. Unfortunately, the week of study is no longer offered, and has not been replaced. Certainly, there is always a need to learn and grow particularly when it comes to spiritual matters and the biblical text. For example, new converts to Christianity are confronted with many questions when they join the church, youth begin to ask questions as they mature in the church, and there are sundry questions that require prolonged answers. In other words, answers to some of the questions are not black and white and require more in depth study in order to provide a comprehensive understanding among the congregants.

Although the week of study is no longer offered, the teaching of the biblical text and spiritual development are presented in different forms. For example, new converts are enrolled in a series of New Members' and discipleship classes. I assisted with the initial design of the curriculum several years earlier when I was assigned leadership over the Discipleship and Evangelism ministries. The traditional Bible study program has taken on a variety of forms over the last few years—books are used in conjunction with the church's theme and the biblical text. I taught a lesson utilizing one of the books, *Covenant Relationship: A More Excellent Way* by Keith Intrater, because the church's theme that year was "It's all about the right relationship."

Every woman's season during March, women ministers are afforded the opportunity to teach on a specific Wednesday nights during Bible study (which is also predicated upon whatever the theme is for that year). I have participated in these

teachings. In addition, thematic Bible studies are also centered on Advent and Revival where ministers are asked to teach lessons. The pastor and Berean's leadership recognized that many in the congregation are hurting emotionally, physically and spiritually from childhood trauma and other life experiences, and has created space for formational prayer to effectuate healing. Recently, the church suffered a major traumatic experience when one of its members, a young man, husband and father, committed suicide. The pastor recognized the need for church-wide healing and designed the weekly Bible study to address the incident. I was afforded the opportunity to teach one of the sessions on the signs of grief, and to discuss an article I wrote "Is There No Balm in Gilead?" in *The Living Pulpit*.<sup>161</sup> I was a replacement presenter, nevertheless, I was grateful for the Pastor's confidence in my ability to teach, and able to do so on a short notice. Other highlights from my teaching experiences include:

- The creation and facilitation of evangelism workshops as the Director of Marketing and Evangelism for the church from 2004 – 2006;
- Teaching on the Holy Spirit annually at the Ministry of Sacred Dance's new member orientation;
- Teaching at women's conferences for other churches; and,
- Teaching singles and young adults on allowing God to work on their inner selves in a workshop I designed "Lord, Make my Cake: A Recipe for Wholeness."

In many respects, my teaching ability can be summed up as coherent and effective when it comes to adults, however, I am not that confident when it comes to teaching youth.

### A Quick Literature Review

The fulfillment of this ministerial competency consisted of creating a bibliography specific for teaching youth, and providing new resources for youth

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<sup>161</sup> "Is There No Balm in Gilead?" is featured in *The Living Pulpit* 23, (Summer 2014): 7.

leaders/teachers. A host of youth ministers and theologians have contributed to the critical discourse and reflection on how best to teach theology to youth and the pedagogical engagement of spirituality. Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean's *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, Dorothy Bass and Don Richter's *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*, and Patricia Davis' *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls*, were several books that have stimulated my desire for teaching youth spiritual nuances and sharing information with youth leaders/teachers.

Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean inspired pastoral ministry to youth through their work. They theorize, "We know that ministry precedes theology and that the God we meet in the pages of scripture is not a theologian, but a minister."<sup>162</sup> In other words, the spin, the turn is to think of youth ministry as a theologian. The reflection in the theological turn is to emphasize how youth leaders/workers inform youth to help them shape their own theologies, which is what this project wants to help accomplish.

During a phone conversation with Evelyn L. Parker, professor of practical theology at Southern Methodist University on December 5, 2014, I was provided with a list of websites and books that she felt would be helpful for me and the project. During the conversation, we discussed her book, *The sacred selves of adolescent girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class and Gender*, a book that explores the spirituality of adolescent girls (ages 15-18) in light of systematized oppression experienced by girls from different cultures, ethnicities and locales in North America.<sup>163</sup> She also referred another book where practical youth ministry was in effect particularly to girls such as Dorothy Bass

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<sup>162</sup> Dean and Root, *Theological Turn*, 14.

<sup>163</sup> Evelyn L. Parker, ed. *The sacred selves of adolescent girls: Hard Stories of Race, Class and Gender* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006). In a phone conversation with Dr. Parker on December 5, 2014, I was provided with a list of websites and books that she felt would be resourceful for me and this project.

and Don Richter's *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*. The authors have created a practical and energetic approach to youth ministry, and drill beyond the surface and delve into the physical, spiritual, geological, anthropological, social and emotional contexts that youth experience being out of place in.<sup>164</sup> The book is illustrated and interactive with a correlating website and both are robust with eighteen ways by which teens might shape their lives and relationship with God, incorporating worship and prayer.

What I loved most about Patricia Davis' book, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls*<sup>165</sup> is the fact that her methodology is timeless. The particularity in which she enables girls to talk to her about God, their church affiliations, sexuality and their bodies, is both impressive and replicable. The findings reveal that girls have positive and negative experiences with all of the above, yet the most important takeaway for me is the emphasis Davis places on talking and listening to girls because that is where their spirituality lies – in relationships.

A continuum of pedagogical inference is extrapolated in Tara Fenwick's article "Critical Questions for Pedagogical Engagement of Spirituality"<sup>166</sup> where she poses and answers frequently asked questions regarding learning spirituality. For example, "What desires are driving educators' interests in the spiritual?" Her answer explains how the spiritual experience is objectified in today's culture as fashionable, seductive and in essence, needed to affirm the longing that so many in our society desire.

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<sup>164</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, eds. *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002).

<sup>165</sup> Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

<sup>166</sup> Tara J. Fenwick, "Critical Questions for Pedagogical Engagement of Spirituality" in *Adult Learning/Contestations, Invitations, and Explorations: Spirituality in Adult Learning* (EBSCO Publishing, 2003), 10-12.

There are other resources such as books, articles, videos and leadership helps in regards to teaching youth and becoming a better teacher that I gathered and are listed in the bibliography (see Appendix 3).

### **Evaluating the Process**

The initial plan for fulfilling ministerial competency regarding technology and social media was to become familiar with the latest technology, by attending two workshops/webinars and purchase one app impactful to the project. This strategy was completed—I attended two webinars one regarding social media and the other about blogging. Additionally, I presented the project for a webinar hosted by the Lily Youth Leaders Network. I also attended a workshop at the New Lots Library entitled *Introduction to Social Media*. I approached the project knowing and using a limited number of social media platforms and apps, and I left with new communication devices (cell phone, tablet), one new social media platform (Instagram), and knowledge of what social media teens/youth are using.

As it pertains to being a religious educator, I purposed to acquire and read ten books, and view three videos and create a bibliography containing valuable resources for youth leaders on teaching and learning. I read eight books, eight articles, viewed four videos, visited several teaching websites, and purchased *Building Church Leaders Guide*. Throughout the research process, my awareness of teaching tools, products and services pertaining to youth increased. Additionally, I had an opportunity to engage with authors, scholars and theologians that I never heard of prior to the project and who are now a part of my conversations with my colleagues in ministry. In addition, I was afforded the opportunity to connect with and have conversation with three of the authors – Dr. Evelyn Parker, Professor of Practical Theology and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at

SMU Perkins School of Theology, Daphne Valerius, producer of “The Souls of Black Girls,” and Nancy Redd, author of *Body Drama*.

The resources listed in the religious educator bibliography provided me with insight to new information where I have become not only the beneficiary of such knowledge, but a distributor of the information to which youth leaders/teachers, parents and pastor at Berean are afforded access. The Youth Pastor has been able to use some of the resources to equip the youth leaders spiritually, emotionally and intellectually.

## **CHAPTER 7** **TRANSFORMATION AND NEW INFORMATION**

### ***My Style Changes***

I enrolled in the doctoral program with the intention of participating in a new cohort, Economic Development and the Faith Community that the seminary was offering. This made sense and was a perfect fit for two reasons, first my church, Berean Baptist was engaged in economic development, and secondly because of the fact that I work for a non-profit economic development organization. The cohort did not materialize, therefore, I decided on a creating a sustainability project for Berean's new housing development venture. Berean Community and Family Life Center is required to provide fifteen years of continuous social services in the community at which time the property would be turned over to the church. An excellent way to be assured of this continuity entailed training young adults to become board members of the BCFLC. Another great idea! I began to put this challenge together in class.

Nevertheless, during a class discussion with Dr. Lundy and the cohorts, I happened to restate her words to another student by using an affirmation that one of my high school fashion design teachers would tell us. "If you want to be in fashion, you have to breathe fashion, you have to sleep fashion, you have to eat fashion." In other words, whatever area of expertise you plan to master; it has to become a lifestyle. And suddenly without warning, Dr. Lundy pointed to me and said, "Did I hear you say that you went to fashion school, then why aren't you doing something around that? These girls today

could use some help with their wardrobes.” All I could do at that moment was weep. I wept because the desires and passion I have for fashion and design resurfaced; the work that I was called to do with girls resurfaced and the reminder made me feel as though I abandoned a baby. I recalled the incident after a liturgical dance we ministered at church some years ago when I was “slain in the Spirit” at the altar. After composing myself and I sat up, all of the girls in the dance ministry were encircled around my feet, and I wept. I recalled the words of one of the older ministers informing me later, “You know you’re supposed to be doing something with these girls!” I recalled the “Girl Power! God’s Way” Conferences I instituted in New York and South Africa, and how the Lord placed that baby in my womb to birth. I also recalled a sermon that I preached during one of our women’s seasons “Dressed from the Inside Out” that talked about the spiritual clothes we need to wear to reflect the divine designer of our wardrobes. The recollections hit me like a ton of bricks and I wept openly in the class. I shared an encounter that I experienced that morning on my way to the class that confirmed the suggestion from Dr. Lundy. I encountered one of the teen girls from church on the train on her way to school and we became engaged in a conversation about fashion and concerning her goals since she was currently attending the High School of Fashion Industries. It all began to make sense and rejuvenated my purpose in life.

As I reflected on the origins of my passion for fashion, I thought back to my preteen years. The influence of television with shows like Ed Sullivan and American Bandstand featuring the Motown singers and female groups inspired me to want to design clothes for them. This dream evolved in training at the High School of Art and Design where I studied fashion design. I furthered my studies at the Fashion Institute of Technology majoring in Fashion Buying and Merchandising after which I worked for a

high end retailer of women's wear. My cohort members chimed in to assist me in developing ways of making a meaningful project out of my life experience and passion for fashion and teenage girls.

After developing a challenge statement and solution, I did not realize that going in the project would eventually take a different route leading to an amazing discovery about God-clothes, the tangible and intangible coverings, and how they impact the lives of African American teenage girls. Initially, the focus of the project was about looking at the clothing choices teenage girls were making and about the disdain those clothing choices were creating, not only in the church, but also within the community at-large. By focusing on the clothing choices girls made and not the complexities of those choices, our biases surfaced (mine and those on the Site Team). The biases were revealed when I began working with my advisor, Dr. Nadjwa Norton who elucidated that I needed to rethink the problem or challenge statement without being judgmental and focus on a deeper issue regarding clothes and teenage girls. Consequently, the challenge veered toward theology of clothing, something more sustainable and scholarly if the project was going to focus on education.

After completing the dissertation, the title changed from "Styled b God: A Girl's Guide to Dressing from the Inside Out" to "Styled by God: Constructing a Theology of Intangible Clothing" due to the fact that the playbook or guide has not yet been developed as per the suggestion of my Advisor.

## **Transformation**

I ascribe the journey of transformation during the past three years as having occurred in three phases. It started with excitement and awe, filled with creativity, vibrancy and colors—that is who I am. The fashion dreams were reactivated with

doodling and sketching designs for women clergy: robes, tops and dresses. I found myself sketching every opportunity that I could. In my journal where I write sermon notes, I have sketches. In my notes from a Bible conference that I attended in Ethiopia, I was inspired by the priestly garments and have sketches. At work during staff meetings, I have sketches in the margins of my notepads. I felt effervescent and ready to pursue my passion for fashion. I even purchased a sewing machine to get started. I was invigorated to help African American teenage girls dress from the inside out and outside in.

In the second phase, my vibrancy began to fade with the shift in the challenge and the need to be scholarly. The reality of the workload and the responsibility of what it required to write a dissertation had sapped my enthusiasm. I was comfortable with my style of writing, communicating and way of being. I went from vibrant colors to shades of grey and it was difficult for me to emotionally embrace the assignment. I no longer wanted to continue the project. There was no time for doodling, the images of clergy garments for women “left the building,” and my sewing machine is still in the box. My advisor had to spark flames under me to bring me back around with spontaneous assignments such as write two sentences about theology of clothing, write a dictionary entry for theology of clothing, write six points about theology of clothing and write a letter to theology of clothing. I was numb, fearful, anxious and uncertain and wanted to give up.

In the midst of all of this, life happened. I own a house in Virginia that was in stagnation due to a modification process that took two years. Last year the modification came through which meant time spent going back and forth to make repairs and upgrades. My concentration level wavered immensely. When I was in the MDiv program I was not employed which made studying and writing without obstacles, with the DMin,

however, I have a full-time job and that made time constraints tough in conjunction with traveling back and forth to Virginia. My father was hospitalized in November 2014 which caused my spirit to grieve for about a month.

Nevertheless, in this third phase the information I gathered through the research began to help me see the systemic issues and intersectionality of racism, colorism, consumerism, sexism and religiosity that impacts the clothing choices and identities of African American teenage girls and now I am angry. I am actually writing this paragraph through tears. Advocacy would be the best word to describe where I am right now at the end of the writing process. The Black church has to do a better job of intersecting faith, fashion and identity in the lives of its teenage girls. This project is bigger than me and it goes back to Dr. Griffin's comment regarding today's youth, "Teach me who I am then I won't have to rely on artificial supplements to define myself." Or in the words of Malcolm X, "Who told you to hate what God gave you?"

### **What I Learned**

I discovered during this process of study however, that I chose a subject in need of clarification because, as previously mentioned, theology of clothing is a subject in unfamiliar territory. In order to situate myself in this process I had to reset my goals to ensure my understanding of theology of clothing and increase my awareness of how clothing is used metaphorically and physically in the biblical text. It was inevitable that I needed to delve deeper into theologies of clothing if I was going to instruct or create a program to benefit teenage girls at Berean Baptist Church.

I learned after spending two years with the youth at Berean that I was not as proficient in their vernacular and not as in touch with their way of thinking and processing information as I thought. On several occasions while teaching teen Bible

study my statement or question had to be reinterpreted by one of the other youth leaders. Many words or phrases youth use today had to be translated for me. In many ways, we both have grown in regards to communicating with one another. The implication is that there is a need for intergenerational dialogue and listening more to what youth are not saying within the larger body of the church. Pastor Griffin assigned me, in December 2014, as chair of a newly formed Intergenerational Commission for this very purpose (under protest, of course, because I was still working on my project).

I also learned that youth leaders have to play the role of “stylist” to help youth coordinate the innerwear - the negative or positive spiritual clothes they wear to cover up their true identities, along with the outerwear choices made as a result of their attitudes. Trauma in its varying forms has a lot to do with this cover up, and most often the negative garments are the ones put on. The example of the teenage girl in Bible study smart but wrote insecure across her chest in the body image exercise, or the teenage girl at the workshop, gorgeous but cried because she could not look at herself in the mirror and even the girls who needed affirmation from people on Facebook or Instagram on their selfies – it is a cover up. The image of the intangible clothes clearly speaks to the layers of coverings that must be peeled off to get to the inner core of our being and beauty, the place where God dwells. I assert that one of the greatest implications that arose from this work of youth leaders not articulating theology of clothing to African-American teenage girls is to adopt and create what Norton and Bentley call reflective space and what Parker calls a nurturing space for the souls of African-teenage girls.<sup>167</sup> Such reflection involves marrying pedagogies of critical thinking with spirituality.

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<sup>167</sup> Nadjwa E. L. Norton and Courtney C. Bentley, “Making the Connection: Extending Culturally Responsive Teaching through Home(land) Pedagogies” *Feminist Teacher* 17 no. 1 (2006); Evelyn Parker, *Sacred Selves*, 163-180.

In addition, I also learned that I was on to something new. Everyone that I shared this project vision with has responded in like manner:

My pastor said during our interview, “Gail, I think you’re on to something!”

The director for the Lilly Youth Theology Network, the organization that invited me to present my project, said, “You are on to something here, when you finish your dissertation would you be interested in coming to present?”

A professor of New Testament in our conversation about theologies of clothing said, “You got me thinking now.”

My co-worker said, “This is deep, I can’t wait to read it when you’re finished.”

The librarians at FIT were particularly interested in the project. They said it was timely and that it fills a void. One was interested based on one of the books I had them look up for me. She said, “Now I want to read that.” (ref. *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* by Shane White)

Others are just fascinated by the topic and see the need to discuss it not only with teenage girls, but with women as well. I want this project to benefit not only African American teenage girls in the congregation where I worship and serve, but also to benefit a wider audience in congregations and communities globally due to the urgency of the matter.

With that in mind, and with the difficulties in finding on the ground information for this project, I see the need for additional study and research in the area of biblical theology of clothing and its relevance to faith and fashion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I want to take a minute to thank God who showers wisdom and favor upon me.

Two days before handing this paper in my flash drive disappeared with all my work and clients’ work on it. I have been emailing the dissertation to myself the past few edits and I am thankful for the wisdom and obedience to be prepared for unforeseen disasters.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – PROPOSAL

Appendix 2 – SURVEYS and PROTOCOLS

Appendix 3 – BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESOURCES FOR TEACHING

Appendix 4 – PLAYBOOK COVER DRAFTS

Appendix 5 – SCHOOL BUS DESIGN

Appendix 6 – BIBLIOGRAPHY

## **Appendix One**

### **STYLED BY GOD: A GIRL'S GUIDE TO DRESSING FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

By

GAIL M. DAVIS

### **DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL**

December 1, 2013

#### **Challenge Statement**

I am an Associate minister at Berean Baptist Church in the Weeksville/Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, NY. Statistics show that African American teenage girls between the ages of 13-15 do not exemplify the image of God through their style of dress. This demonstration project will create an educational model that assists these teenagers in developing a positive identity and building self-esteem.

**Revised:** I am an Associate minister at Berean Baptist Church in the Weeksville/Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, NY. A theology(ies) of clothing is not well articulated or circulated by youth leaders to girls 13-15. This demonstration project will create a playbook for youth leaders to expose girls to a theology(ies) of clothing and help them develop their own theology of clothing.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

*"Dressed in Our Sunday Best"*

I am a long-time member of an African-American Baptist church – Berean Baptist Church in Brooklyn, NY, whose foundational roots are grounded in social justice displayed by the racially mixed group of the founding fathers. The ministry did not start out as a segregated church back in 1847 when it was established; it was birthed at a time when America was but a decade from civil conflict. This group of community people fought against two major injustices throughout the course of their early existence. The first being the injustices of slavery through the Abolitionist Movement, where it is cited in the church history that they participated in the Underground Railroad along with other churches to assist persons of African descent to achieve freedom. The second being the alignment with other sympathizers against the brutality against Blacks during the Civil War Draft Riots in New York City in 1863, which was the bedrock of Irish classism through racial, social, and economic oppression.<sup>168</sup>

In 1894, our ministry was the first African American congregation in New York City to build a complete edifice from the foundation. By this time, the white brothers and sisters of the original body, built and moved into their own church – their reason being the walk up the hill was getting to be too much.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, what started out as a racially mixed congregation is now comprised of African-Americans and Caribbean-Americans with an infinitesimal amount of Latinos.

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<sup>168</sup> Tracey Cooper and Carol Dixon, *Remembering Our Past, Redeeming Our Future: Berean Baptist Church Commemorative History Book* (Port Washington: 2001), 11-17.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Berean is deeply entrenched in a tradition of tenured, seminary trained pastors which is still an expectation today. Our membership looks for those with the educational and experiential background to deal with the social ills outside of the church. With the rise in gentrification in our community and eminent domain leveling long established businesses, homes and old landmarks, believers at Berean are now faced with a challenge. Developers who came through the neighborhood with cash, constructed two bedroom condos starting at \$550,000.00, three family homes for \$769,000.00 all around our church - in essence, not low-income or affordable housing. Therefore, the face of the community is changing and returning to a mixed community as more adventurous whites are moving in, while people of color are slowly being displaced.

Several years ago as the former Director of Marketing for the church, I had to take this demographic information into consideration and wanted to design our materials with images of inclusiveness, but was met with opposition by some of the leaders who wanted to maintain an '*us*' look instead. That burdened my heart because, to me, that does not reflect Jesus Christ nor does it leave the church with a welcoming spirit of openness in the community. With such a rich history you would think we would be open to reaching out to our new neighbors in a more intentional way.

Consequently, despite the church's fervent stance on social justice, it is also a place where the outward appearance of a person is important. I remember growing up having a separate wardrobe for church and how the members came on Sunday mornings 'decked out' in their Sunday best. That spirit has perpetuated an image of our church by outsiders as the bourgeois black church. Interestingly, the church is located between two major city housing projects, a city park across the street where the locals hang out and

entertain themselves, and before the condos, there was tenement housing surrounding the church. In our outreach efforts, we encountered people who told us they felt uncomfortable coming to church because they did not have anything to wear.

We have relaxed our dress code and style over the years – women wear pants, men come without ties. Yet when the locals come in dressed in their street clothes they are treated differently sometimes and made to feel uncomfortable. I like to quip that the ushers will sit the devil in a blue dress down front, while Jesus, dressed in tattered clothes will be seated in the back of the church. That is the new community God desires the Church to invite inside – not only the physical church but more importantly, inside the spiritual church. How can we say we love God whom we do not see and not love or show hospitality to our brothers and sisters whom we do see? The doors of the church, our hearts, have to be opened to experience true *koinonia*. Without Jesus, there is no church.

Our current pastor, who is the 19<sup>th</sup> in the church's history, has brought a maroon-influence to our church culture. Maroon is his favorite color because it symbolizes the determination and strength of his ancestors, the Maroons in the South, who in defiance escaped slavery and outsmarted the slave owners through their habitation in the Dismal Swamp. This maroon color is reflected in his attire, our church logo, stationary, banners, marketing materials, and the church décor. He will correct you if you say burgundy – it is maroon! When one walks through our church campus, the Afrocentric threads are visible and are connected to the woven fabric of our faith tradition and culture.

Some of the major changes that have taken place since pastor's tenure center upon leadership and inclusion of women in those positions. Women were no longer called Deaconesses, they became ordained Deacons. Women were appointed to the Trustee

Board and as Sunday School Superintendent. Today, the women Associate Ministers outnumber the men. What used to be auxiliaries and clubs are now called ministries – that was a culture shock - our church was known for its elaborate social programs, fundraising, and church services. Much of that was halted because pastor wanted the church to embrace tithing and for us to become a tithing church. Nevertheless, the church leadership and the church operations are now organized through a system of checks and balances including a church council, which consists of the presidents and vice presidents of the ministries, diaconate and trustee boards and ministers. This is representative of the autonomy of the Baptist tradition where laypersons have authority in the church.

A great amount of activity goes on at the church, but we have to resolve within ourselves what really matters to God and our relationship with humanity – what is most important to ‘put on’ as we go about our daily lives, and what do we want people to see us wearing? The Apostle Paul wrote, “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col. 3:12-14). We are representatives for Christ in the earth, we are ambassadors for God, and we are a reflection of God since we were made in God’s image and likeness. With that said, our church has a history of having a large and effective youth ministry, a ministry that I grew up in and brought my daughter to in order for her to experience church life through social activities, leadership training and worship participation. Our girls today are struggling with emotional, physical and social issues today that have many of them unaware of who they are in God. The influence of the media, reality TV, and videos have girls dressing in a manner that is not reflecting the image of God – God has standards!

While church clothes were an important part of the African American experience in my day, they have lost their meaning to this generation. However, the important attire to wear are the ones that are created by the Divine Designer who dresses us in compassion, mercy, patience, gentleness, forgiveness and love – it is then that we are dressed in our *Sunday Best!*

CHAPTER 2  
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE  
*The Devil Wears Prada*

This topic of dressing from the inside out for girls was buried in my heart and was pulled to the surface by Dr. Lundy during one of our cohort sessions. My passion for empowering girls to live according to the way God desires propelled me several years ago to implement *Girl Power! God's Way* Conferences in New York and in South Africa that were very successful in addressing many of the issues girls faced at that time – sex, anger, health, and relationships. I will combine my desire to empower girls spiritually with my passion for fashion and the two will merge to make a powerful impact in the lives of girls 13 – 15 years old.

In discussing this topic with my Site Team we have all agreed that this issue is one that needs addressing. It is becoming more apparent that clothing choices are getting out of hand with our girls, that there seems to be no regard for showing off their body parts in public, and there is no line drawn as to where and how clothes are worn. What is worn to a party is worn to school or church and even work, and what is worn to bed is worn in the streets (pajamas, head scarves and slippers). Kenya Johnson stated that a spirit of laziness, this unkemptness by young people is part of the force immobilizing our young people.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Site Team conference call May 23, 2013.

We have identified and agreed that several factors may be contributing to these clothing choices by girls. Jonnel Green, who runs a youth program in Harlem has shared that his observations in his program with girls indicate there are mental health issues, home issues, low self-esteem, and vying for the attention of the opposite sex as possibilities. Gerri Scott, who leads one of the largest girl scout troops in Brooklyn has discussed the issue of clothes with some of the girls and have learned that physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, parental involvement (parents buy the clothes), peer pressure, and the influence of the media are factors that lead to their choices of clothes. She also revealed that there is a difference in clothing selection between the churched and non-churched girls as demonstrated on a night out she hosted. “It seemed that the church girls were the ones who came in tight, spandex dresses (looking ‘hoochie’) while the non-church going girls came dressed conservatively,” she remarked. Rev. Marsha Scipio, youth pastor at Berean, has observed that girls bare themselves to get attention from the boys and seem to miss the connection with their faith after Sunday.

In his book, *Five Cries of Youth*, Merton Strommen ascertained that in several of their studies in the 70s and 80s generated results that the power of religious faith to transform lives showed up in young adolescents (ages ten to fifteen).<sup>171</sup> That one of the five cries of youth is joyous is a testimony of their relationship and identity with a personal God, morally responsible to God and holds a hopeful outlook with respect to the future.

There was a time when young people, particularly African American youth, cared about how they looked. They presented themselves in society perhaps to show

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<sup>171</sup> Merton P. Strommen, *Five Cries of Youth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 121.

themselves worthy or to show that they are just as much a part of society as their white counterparts, I do not know. However, when you look at the photos from the civil rights movement, young people dressed with pride, they even protested dressed in their best.<sup>172</sup> What happened to this sense of pride? What happened to this identity in God being a physical manifestation in the way youth perceive themselves?

Nevertheless, the critical issue remains what is the message girls are giving about who they are through their clothing choices. Is there a biblical perspective that addresses the way we dress or look on the outside? What are the spiritual ramifications of today's fashion trends, if any? Is there a spirit under which we are living that dictates the clothing choices made? Does God really care about how we look on the outside or does God look at the heart? How are the seams of emotional well-being and outward adornment connected through fashion? Does the church have a say in the matter of dress? These questions will be taken into consideration with this project.

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<sup>172</sup>See photographs of young people in *We've Got A Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March* by Cynthia Levinson (Atlanta: Peachtree, 2012).

CHAPTER 3  
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION  
*An Unfashionable Attire: Styled by God*

## **Goals and Strategies**

### **Goal 1: Raise Awareness at Berean Baptist Church**

**Strategy 1** – Preach an introductory sermon at my church during NYC Fashion Week (between February and March) – a '*Fashion Week for the Soul*' – to introduce the project with a fashion show of virtues. In addition, preach sermons on the third Sunday (which is our youth Sunday) on black religion and aesthetics which ties in with the origins of church clothes during Black History (Feb.) and/or Women's History Month (Mar.).

**Strategy 2** – Design the *Styled by God* logo and have it solidified by the end of February. Hire a teen girl to design a newsletter where the issue of church clothes and the relationship they have to the image of God will be discussed through weekly postings, and Google alerts.

**Strategy 3** – Present the concept at our church's Annual Women's Conference in March where a segment is always dedicated to girls in order to solicit participants for the working team.

### **Evaluation of Goal 1 –**

- I will have an audio and video of the introductory sermon with the date.

- I will have a pre and post questionnaire in the bulletin to collect feedback from the congregation at each event. I anticipate that at least 60% will complete the questionnaire.
- A list with at least eight interested persons signed up from the Women's Conference to be a part of the working team.

### **Goal 2: Create a working team to help design and implement the project.**

**Strategy 1** – Set criteria at a meeting with Site Team the first week of February to determine who should be on the working team and how many should participate.

**Strategy 2** – Set a date to meet with individuals that are to be part of the working team to discuss their roles and responsibilities by the fourth week of March.

**Strategy 3** – Host a visioning meeting with both teams to plan the implementation of the solution.

#### **Evaluation of Goal 2 –**

- At least four persons from the Site team will avail themselves for the first meeting.
- At least five of the persons who signed up to participate on the working team will attend the information meeting.
- At least fifty percent of the team members attend the visioning meeting in order to create the educational model.

### **Goal 3: Create the Educational Model**

**Strategy 1** – Schedule eight strategy meetings with the ‘teams’ to create the ‘play book’ - plan of action and structure for the ‘*Styled by God*’ curriculum.

**Strategy 2** – Gather research from thirty books with the support and efforts of two research assistants.

**Strategy 3** – Have monthly Bible Study sessions going on with 10-15 teen girls simultaneously to keep the momentum going.

**Strategy 4** – Develop ninety percent of what needs to be done for the program to be successful during this time frame.

#### **Evaluation of Goal 3 –**

- All eight meetings will be held to create the educational model and additional meetings will be held until the goal is reached.
- Research will be conducted and retrieved from twenty books by the two research assistants.
- At least ten girls will attend Bible Study monthly.
- Seventy-five percent of what needs to be done on this curriculum will be accomplished.

#### **Goal 4 – Implement the Program**

**Strategy 1** – Begin the program January, 2015 that will run through June 30, 2015 (10 weeks).

**Strategy 2** – Have ten girls ages 13 – 15 enrolled in the program.

**Strategy 3** – Get donations from fifteen fashion houses/designers and stores to fill the school bus closet that will house clothes for teen girls as an incentive for the girls completing the program and the place to select their clothes for the conference fashion show.

**Strategy 4** – Host a *Girl Power! God's Way Conference* at the end of the program in July with 150 girls in attendance. We will invite other churches and girls' organizations. The ten girls should finish the program with a sense of who they are and what their style is; and be able to empower other girls through worship and sharing.

**Evaluation of Goal 4 –**

- All ten girls in the age range designated will complete the 10-week program.
- 150 plus girls will attend the Girl Power conference.
- Receive donations of clothing from ten fashion designers/stores for the school bus closet.

**CHAPTER 3(**REVISED**)**  
**PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION**  
*An Unfashionable Attire: Styled by God*

### **Goals and Strategies**

#### **Goal 1: To Understand the Similarities and Differences of Theology of Clothing**

**Strategy 1** –I will research the subject by reading at least twenty books and six articles on the biblical theology of clothing and theology of clothing from the secular fashion perspective.

**Strategy 2** – Collect artifacts and images for document analysis that assist with visually understanding theology of clothing.

**Strategy 3** – Conduct two focus groups: one with theologians and one with Berean clergy as a form of inquiry about their knowledge on the biblical theologies of clothing and how this knowledge can be used to help me develop theological analysis regarding clothing.

#### **Evaluation of Goal 1 –**

- I would have read fifteen books and six articles on both a biblical and secular theology of clothing and will generate a resource listing of these materials that will be a benefit to youth leaders to increase their knowledge of the subject.
- I will have collected five forms of the artifacts for theology of clothing as part of my document analysis.

- I will have conducted one focus group with theologians and one focus group with Berean clergy to receive knowledge and information about biblical theologies of clothing.

## **Goal 2: Raise Awareness of theologies of clothing at Berean Baptist Church**

**Strategy 1** – Preach two sermons to continuously bring theology of clothing before the Berean congregation. Design and distribute a pre and post survey to a random sample in the congregation.

**Strategy 2** – Conduct interviews with the pastor, with youth leaders, Associate Ministers, and with African American teenage girls (13-15) as well as one focus group with each sector as a way to pull together information that will be useful for the construction/design of the playbook.

**Strategy 3** – Have theological discussions in small groups with youth leaders about theology of clothing and design teaching materials to help youth leaders adequately discuss the subject.

### **Evaluation of Goal 2 –**

- Distributed surveys by Site Members in the church to a random sample in the congregation (75) will be collected after church and analyzed after each sermon.
- Analyze the data from the recorded interviews with seven clergy members, five youth leaders, and fifteen African American/Caribbean teenage girls and compile findings. One focus group with each sector will have occurred and analyzed to ascertain the common themes.

- After six discussion group sessions, youth leaders will be informed and able to discuss theology of clothing with the teenage girls/youth they minister to from the teaching materials designed to assist them.

### **Goal 3 – Create a Playbook for Youth Leaders to Teach Theology of Clothing to Teenage Girls (13-15)**

**Strategy 1**– Organize a group of seven persons who will form the working team; call an initial meeting to set the guidelines for participation, and make the roles and responsibilities clear. The working team will be comprised of both teenage girls and adults who will work on developing the playbook.

**Strategy 2** – Meet with the working team over a four month period with data collected from prior workshops and interviews to thought partner in the creation of the playbook.

**Strategy 3** – Publish the manuscript for the playbook and present at a youth leaders meeting at Berean for review, discussion and revisions.

#### **Evaluation of Goal 3 –**

- The working team will be assembled with the seven members and the recorded minutes from the initial meeting will be compiled.
- Minutes of the meetings will be recorded and chapter structures will have materialized.
- A printed copy of the manuscript will be distributed at a youth leaders meeting at Berean for final review and discussion. Surveys will be distributed for feedback about the content.

## **Goal 4 – To Embody Liberatory Theologies and Practices that Counter Oppressive Norms for Females**

**Strategy 1-** Facilitate three small group discussions to dialogue adult men and women on how theologies of clothing impacted fashion choices, expectations of, and treatment of females over time in the church through Bible study and/or small groups.

**Strategy 2 –** Conduct three workshops with teenage girls inviting guest speakers and presenters with knowledge of the subject to help the girls critically think about how females are portrayed in the present culture.

**Strategy 3 –** Create and post a quarterly public service announcement using social media and the *Styled by God* website that will be created on the subject of oppressive norms and treatment of females due to clothing choices.

### **Evaluation of Goal 4 –**

- Surveys will be designed to evaluate the three discussion groups to evaluate the participants' increased knowledge and recommendations.
- Pre and post questionnaires will be distributed at the three workshops to analyze the outcomes of the workshops.
- Four public service announcements will be created and posted on social media and the *Styled by God* website providing opportunities for comments and feedback.

CHAPTER 4  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS  
*There Is A Way That Seams Right*

**Research Question 1**

*Biblical/Theological*

What does the Bible say about clothing? How have others (denominations and/or individuals) interpreted the Bible regarding clothes/attire for women including early church fathers like Tertullian?

**Research Question 2**

*Practical Methodology*

What are the developmental models – particularly from an African American standpoint that will help teenage girls have a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem? What are some of the practical steps teenage girls can take to respond to crisis or dysfunction to bring healing? How can we help teenage girls answer the questions: ‘Who am I? Where am I going? And how am I going to get there?’ with biblical and social praxis?

**Research Question 3**

*Historical*

What role has fashion/clothing played in the African American experience? in the black church experience? Where did the origin of dressing in ‘church clothes’ or Sunday Best come from? Historically, the black church has projected the image of ‘church clothes’, is this as important an identity marker today for this generation?

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION PROCESS

*Style Decoded*

#### **Method of Evaluation 1**

How will we define success in this demonstration project? What will transformation look like for the girls participating in the program? One method of evaluation will be qualitative research. Since this project is one that desires to foster a change in the attitudes of girls towards their identity and self-esteem – helping them recognize and exemplify the image of God through their style of dress – various milestones of evaluation will be conducted throughout the life of the program.

These evaluation models will contain the six steps to effective evaluation: focus; creating the evaluation design; data collection, and analysis.<sup>173</sup> From the onset, focused pre and post questionnaires will be given out during the awareness phase at the stated events and activities. The evaluation process will also look at how the materials, events planned and structures created support the designed program goals. Impacts and results will be determined in relationship to the events and activities. Since the bulk of the project will be the creation of the ‘play book’ curriculum for the project, qualitative analysis will be critical to this particular goal – coding material, noting discrepancies and pointing out what is missing.

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<sup>173</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Projects That Matter: Successful Planning & Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (The Alban Institute, 2003).

I will employ the expertise of an experienced evaluator for the project because someone objective and unbiased toward the project will provide feedback with a critical eye and mindset, and be in a position to draw conclusions that are measurable both qualitatively and quantitatively necessary for evaluating the project. This person will work with me and my Site Team throughout the duration of the project to provide ongoing feedback and information necessary to design a quantitative study.

The bottom line is to determine if I accomplished what I set out to do with this project; have I reached my goals, satisfied my strategic plans and uncovered new information.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES**  
*Dressed From the Inside Out*

### **The Process**

The site team met with Reverend Davis to review our individual assessments of her ministerial competencies and to determine those areas in which she would need to become more proficient, particularly as it pertains to her proposed project.

1. Theologian: Rev. Davis is a skilled theologian. She demonstrates strong biblical knowledge and the ability to apply sound theology within the contemporary context. At the same time she has a strong desire to continue developing theological insight and analysis and broaden her understanding of diverse theologians. Rev. Davis would also like to increase her knowledge of secular disciplines particularly as her project requires the integration of psychology and sociology.
2. Preacher: Rev. Davis is a very competent preacher. She delivers well-prepared, Spirit-directed, biblically based sermons that effectively addresses the needs of the congregation.
3. Worship Leader: Rev. Davis often leads worship at Berean Baptist Church. She is an effective and engaging presider. She is very attentive to the Spirit and she has the ability to shepherd congregants into meaningful worship experiences. With greater opportunity to do so, she hopes to become more adept at using various art forms and sacred music within the liturgy.

4. Prophetic Agent: Rev. Davis is passionate about social justice issues and very sensitive to the social location of her congregants. She has a keen ability to challenge ethical ideas and encourage individuals to become change agents in their community. She is able to do this in small groups as well as from the pulpit through carefully crafted sermons.
5. Leader: Rev. Davis has honed her leadership skills over the years. She has the ability to draw others into her vision and motivate them to work to their potential. She is often willing to take the initiative, yet she knows how to let others lead.
6. Religious Educator: Rev. Davis seeks to develop her skills and talents as a religious educator. Rev. Davis values education and sound reasoning. Moreover, she demonstrates adequate knowledge of religious concepts and challenges. Nevertheless, Rev. Davis would like to sharpen her ability to diagnose the needs of individuals and design appropriate educational strategies to address both individual and group needs. Developing a greater understanding of the learning process across the continuum of human life while employing sound teaching methods will be critical for her project.
7. Counselor: Rev. Davis is a wonderful pastoral counselor. She understands what it means to be a shepherd and to help guide others to a place where they may experience healing and/or become better self-managers of their lives. This is another area that will be very important as she engages young women in sensitive discussions.
8. Pastor: Rev. Davis performs various pastoral functions in her role as Associate Minister at Berean. She makes both new-comers and members feel welcomed and loved. She takes time out of her schedule to sit with the bereaved and those who are ill. As with most leaders, she admittedly has to improve her self-care habits.

9. Spiritual Leader: Rev. Davis is a competent spiritual leader within her own religious community and tradition. She compassionately guides others to greater spiritual maturity.
10. Ecumenist: Rev. Davis recognizes that this is an area to which she needs to pay particular attention. She will be intentional about spending time in worship and dialogue with other traditions to understand both their cultural and religious context. This is critical for her research as she seeks to gain the perspective of girls of different faiths.
11. Witness or Evangelist: Rev. Davis is an exemplary witness of the Gospel to believers and non-believers. She is not ashamed to share her beliefs; while at the same time, she lets her walk be her witness, where speaking may not be appropriate.
12. Administrator: Rev. Davis seeks to hone her skills as an administrator. She would like to be better able to develop strategies from goals and help others to become more involved in the decision making-process. She also needs to learn how to evaluate projects and use the results to plan and implement steps to completion of set goals.
13. Professionalism: Rev. Davis definitely approaches ministry in a professional manner. She has open and honest relationships with both her colleagues and members of the congregation, while demonstrating a positive professional attitude. Rev. Davis still desires to develop her listening skills, ability to deal with conflict and to say “no” when it is warranted.
14. Financial Management: As Rev. Davis embarks on this project she intends to pay particular attention to this area. She is capable of sound stewardship and grant

writing; but she needs to familiarize herself with some of the hard skills in this area such as budgeting, tax laws and risk management.

15. Technology & Social Media Management: Rev. Davis is a very creative and experienced graphic designer. Moreover, she is not afraid to use technology to communicate her message. She understands the importance of social media to the population with which she will be doing her project so she expects to become even more adept in this area.

### **Competencies Chosen for More Development**

#### **Religious Educator –**

##### Goal:

To sharpen my teaching skills in order to identify the needs of individuals; and to design appropriate, educational strategies to address those needs especially for teenage girls.

##### Strategy:

Acquire and read 15 books and watch 6 videos to develop a bibliography of about twenty resources specific to teaching African American teen girls.

Evaluation – I will have read ten books and watched 3 videos and develop a fifteen resource bibliography specific to teaching African American teen girls.

#### **Technology and Social Media**

##### Goal:

To familiarize myself with the latest technology apps and social media management techniques including those used by churches.

##### Strategy:

Attend two workshops/webinars teaching the latest technology tools particularly those young people are using and purchase one app impactful to the project.

**Evaluation:**

I will attend two workshops and/or webinar and purchase one app.

## Appendix A

### TIMELINE

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible
2/2014	Proposal Approval by Director	Two copies of proposal with letters from site team	Me
2/2014	Retain Evaluator	References and resources	Me/Site Team
2/2014 – 3/2014	Raise Awareness Introductory Sermon	Sermon; Drama/Dance Ministry members; Lots of Fabric	Me/D-Smith
3/2014 – 2/2015	Monthly Bible Study series	Bible Study scriptures/reference material	Me/Scipio
2/20/14 - 3/2014	Design Logo Create Newsletter	A person designated	Me/Green
3/2014	Present at Women's Conference	Sign-up sheets	Scipio/Scott
4/2014	Meet with Site Team to set criteria for working team		Me
4/2014	Evaluate Goal 1  Prepare Report for Site team  Monitor Ministerial Competency Goal	Data collected from evaluations  Assessment tool	Me/Site Team Evaluator Me Me
4/2014	Assemble Working Team	Meeting with Site Team to discuss criteria	Me/Site Team
5/2014	Hold visioning Meeting for working team		w/Site Team
5/2014	Travel for research		Me

5/2014	Evaluate Goal 2		Evaluator
6/2014 – 11/2014	Begin the first of eight monthly meeting to create the educational model		Me/working team/Site Team
7/2014	Have a solid answer and direction about the school bus	Confirmation from bus company	Me and Bill
	Secure Advisor		Me
	Select Editor		Me
7/2014 – 9/2014	Research		Me and assistants
12/2014	Evaluate Goal 3		
1/2015	Evaluation summations		
	Review writing with Advisor		
2/2015	Rewrites		
4/2015	Present		
5/2015	Graduation	An approved dissertation	Me

## Appendix B

### BUDGET

Date	Task/Activity	Tools to Complete Task	Cost/Funding
	Competency for More Development – Religious Education	Books	\$100.00
	Competency for More Development – Technology & Social Media Management	Conferences/Workshops Training / Purchase Apps	\$500.00
	Retain Evaluator for the project	Site team member contact	\$350.00
	Travel expenses – out of state for research	Tickets, lodging, meetings scheduled with authors	\$600.00
	Travel expenses – in state for research and meetings	Gas, Metrocards	\$400.00
	Supplies	Ink cartridges, paper, binders/folders, etc., pens, pencils, poster sheets	\$300.00 In-kind
	Stipends – research assistants		\$150.00
	Editor		\$750.00
	Marketing/Advertising	Design layout of announcements	\$400.00 and in-kind
	Speaker Honorariums (for workshops/conference)		In-kind \$300.00
	Recorder – for interviews		\$75.00
	Books – resource materials		\$300.00
	Dissertation		\$150.00

	Postage		\$100.00
	Storage containers for clothes/clothing items		\$60.00
<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>		<b>\$4535.00</b>	

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## **Appendix Two**

### Surveys and Protocols

#### Focus Group of Clergy on Theology and its Presence in the Church

When I mention theology, what comes to mind?

Why do we not use the word theology in church?

To what degree do you want the congregation to understand theologies and talk about theologies?

What value does and should theology play in the different educational components of the church?

How theology is (not) presented in the church

How do you imagine making theology more explicit in the church?

What are different ways that we can present theologies in the church?

How do you imagine theologies being taught at young stages so the youth can have access to them?

#### Theologies of clothing

In your opinion, does God care about clothing?

What do you make of the tension of church beliefs and practices around clothing?.

What do you think about when you hear theologies of clothing?

What scriptures come to mind when you hear theologies of clothing?

What traditions and doctrine come to mind when you hear theologies of clothing?

How oppressive do you think these scriptures, doctrine, and traditions are to women and girls?

How might we make theologies of clothing more accessible to youth?

How do we make sure that the theologies of clothing are liberatory for our youth?

## Focus Group Clergy Protocol

### Focus Group of Clergy for Possible Content of the Playbook

Explain the concept of the playbook, its purpose, and value.

Talking about theology to young people

Imagine that you were just selected to teach theology to youth, what basic tenets and understandings of theology need to be included?

You are about to sit down and read your teacher resource book, what do you hope is inside that will help you talk about theology to youth?

Tools and resources for teaching theology

You are teaching youth about the theologies of clothing, what tips, suggestions, and advice for the teaching of theology would you need?

What basic tenets and understandings of teaching theology need to be included?

What resources do you think need to be included in this playbook?

What aspects of teaching in general need to be included?

Message that needs to be presented and how should it be presented

If you had to think of categories for teaching the theologies of clothing, what would they be?

What aspects of female youth's daily living and experiences need to be connected in relation to theologies of clothing?

What aspects of liberation need to be emphasized?

If you picked up this book and said, this is great what would the book look like and contain? What formats or genres?

What types of illustrations, charts, or timelines might you find useful?

What tone or voice, would you want all of this information presented to you and why?

Take the time to share any last thought on how would you want this information to be presented that would make it most accessible and user-friendly for you as a youth leader.

## First Interview Protocol for Youth Leaders on Teaching Practices

### Current Teaching Practices

1. What qualifications do you have that allow you to teach?
2. What techniques do you use when working/teaching youth?
3. Describe ways you are an effective teacher.
4. Describe ways in which you are an ineffective teacher.
5. What pool of knowledge are you drawing from to teach?
6. Do you create your lessons or are they given to you by someone else?
7. How do you prepare your lessons?
8. How do you differentiate in age groups?
9. Youth are very inquisitive today. What happens when you are challenged by the youth, how do you handle that?
10. When you use Bible stories and teaching directly from the Bible, how do people respond?
11. Tell me about what a day in youth church. How do you spend that time?
12. How is your teaching consistent and inconsistent with the overall mission of the church?
13. If I were to mention the word theology, what comes to mind?

### Teacher-Student Relationships

14. Tell me some of the ways that you get the best communication or dialogue out of the youth.
15. Describe ways that you allow youth to guide the learning process.
16. Describe ways in which you don't allow youth to guide the learning process.
17. How do your biases show up in teaching?
18. How do your biases make it difficult to teach certain youth?

19. How do your biases make it difficult for certain youth to learn?
20. How do you feel when you are challenged by youth?
21. What happens to the power dynamics when you are challenged by youth?
22. Think about the time that you interject, cut youth off, or tell a life story. Why are you doing it? How are youth responding?

### Assessment of Self and Youth

23. What goals have you set for learning?
24. How do you set goals for learning?
25. How do you track what you teach?
26. How do you track what youth learn?
27. How are you assessing whether or not what you teaching the youth is effective?
28. Tell me some of the reasons why you think youth just don't get it.
29. How do you decide when the individuals are ready for the next level of learning?
30. Tell me some of the barriers and hindrances that you have discovered in your teaching.
31. How do evaluate your effectiveness as a teacher?
32. What feedback do you solicit about the youth that helps you develop your teaching?
33. How do you feel after teaching the youth?
34. What do you think about after you finished teaching?

### Needs, Supports, and Resources

35. If you were to list some supports and things that would make teaching more effective for you, what would that be?
36. What do you need from the church leadership that you feel that you are not getting that would make you a more effective teacher?

**37. What resources would make teaching more effective for you?**

**38. What do you need in order to increase your Bible knowledge? (additional training, software, time to study)**

## Protocols for Designers

1. Where does your inspiration come from when you design for teenage girls?
2. What are the spiritual influences (if any) that contribute to your designs for teenage girls?
3. What factors do you take into consideration:
  - a. Age
  - b. Location
4. What challenges have you faced as the evolution of girls changed in the way you design?
5. In your experience, how has social constructs of teen girls influenced your design?
6. What do you do to spend time around girls to inform your work?

## Theology of Clothing Project

### Youth Survey

1-Strongly Disagree      2- Disagree      3- Agree      4- Strongly Agree

1. I love my body.\_\_\_\_\_
2. I believe my body belongs to me and I can do what I want with it.\_\_\_\_\_
3. After the Bible Study I still believe that my body belongs to me.\_\_\_\_\_

4. It was difficult for me to complete the activity where I outlined my body.\_\_\_\_\_
5. What are two things you learned or realized from completing the body outline?  
1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_

6. I still have more to learn about my body.\_\_\_\_\_
7. I was uncomfortable when asked to think about how I view myself. Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. The media affects my self- image.\_\_\_\_\_
9. After completing my body outline, I discovered I have had negative feelings towards my body.\_\_\_\_\_
10. After Bible Study, I decided to think more about how I view myself on a daily basis.\_\_\_\_\_
11. Before the Bible Study, I would compare the way I look to celebrities and others.\_\_\_\_\_
12. Now, I am more aware of how I feel about myself and why.\_\_\_\_\_
13. After the Bible Study, I do not compare myself to others as often as I did before.\_\_\_\_\_
14. I believe now more than ever that God created me wonderfully and with a purpose.\_\_\_\_\_
15. I believe that my choice of clothing is a reflection of how I feel about myself.\_\_\_\_\_
16. When I get up in the morning, I wear certain clothing based on how I feel.\_\_\_\_\_
17. I care about what my friends think about the way I dress.\_\_\_\_\_
18. I believe how I dress should matter to God.\_\_\_\_\_
19. My faith in God influence what I wear.\_\_\_\_\_
20. I enjoyed the Bible studies on Body Image and Clothing.\_\_\_\_\_
21. Something I wish we would have discussed is \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix Three**

### **Religious Educator Bibliography**

The resources listed below are part of the strategic plan to fulfill the goal of increasing my knowledge of teaching practices:

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Film kit: Starting Small, available from the Teaching Tolerance website.  
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### **Websites:**

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[www.practicingourfaith.org](http://www.practicingourfaith.org)

[www.waytolive.org](http://www.waytolive.org)

[www.commonsensemedia.com](http://www.commonsensemedia.com)

**Other Resources:**

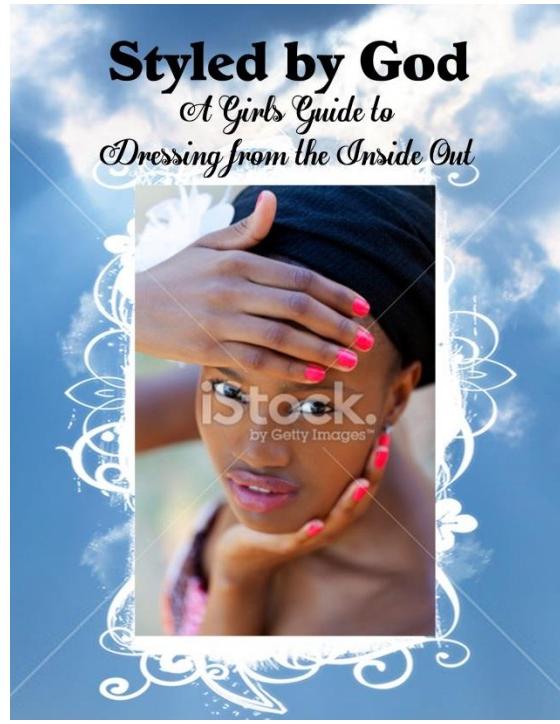
“Becoming a Great Teacher” Leaders Guide, a resource package comprised of various writers in Building Church Leaders, *Christianity Today Intl.* 2007.

## Appendix Four

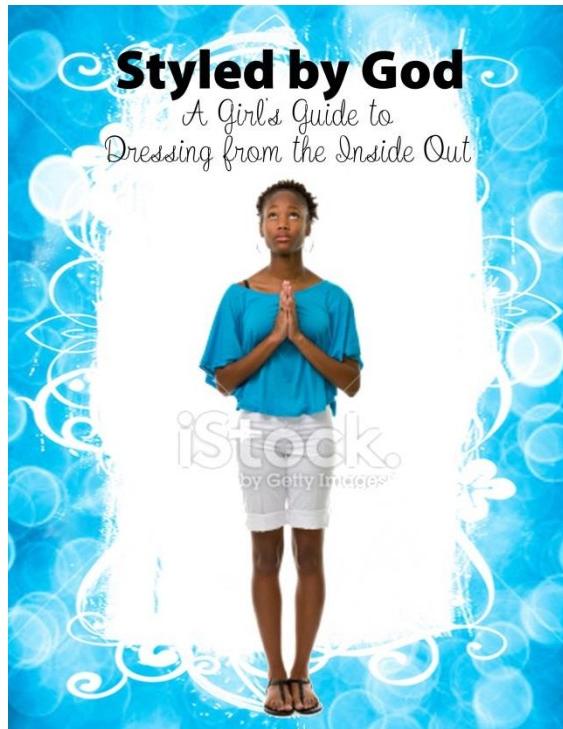
Draft playbook cover designs by Clover Davenport and Gail Davis (none have been selected for production as of yet).



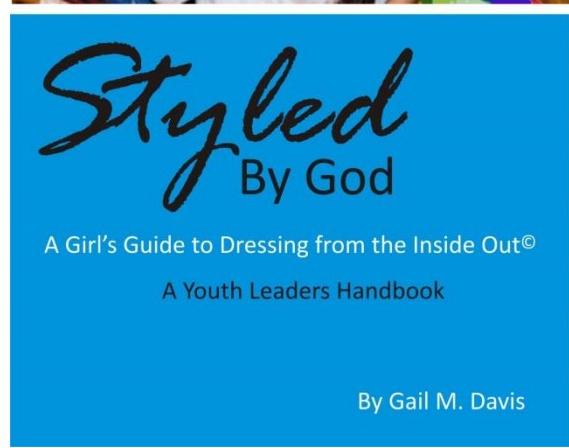
**Styled by God**  
*A Girl's Guide to  
Dressing from the Inside Out*



**Styled by God**  
*A Girl's Guide to  
Dressing from the Inside Out*

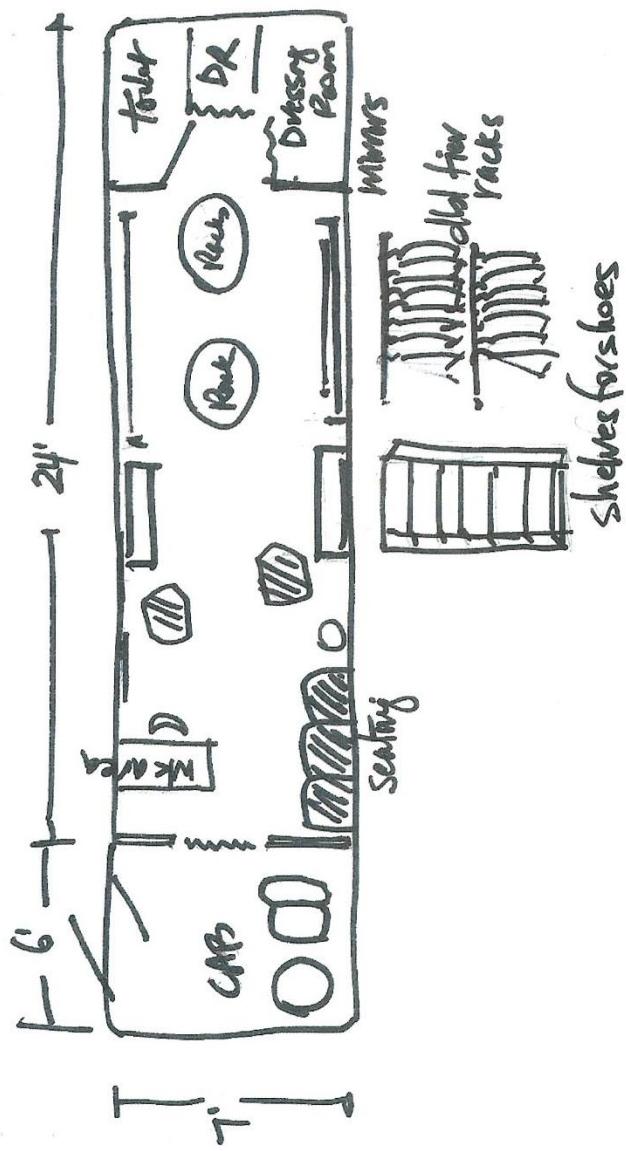


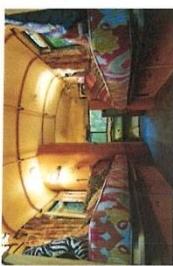
**Styled by God**  
*A Girl's Guide to  
Dressing from the Inside Out*



## Appendix Five – Bus Design

Bus layout idea

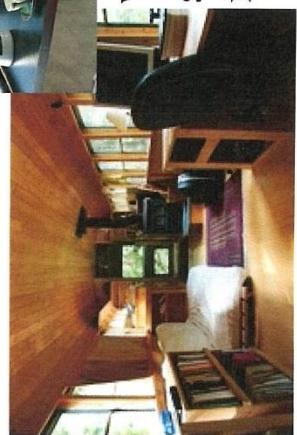




## Shelving



## Work station ideas



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